



Making Texts in Villages: Textual Production in Rural China During the Ming-Qing Period

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Making Texts in Villages:
Textual Production in Rural China During the Ming-Qing Period

A dissertation presented
By
Ren-Yuan Li
To
The Committee on History and East Asian Languages

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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In the subject of
History and East Asian Languages

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Abstract

This dissertation uses the textual materials found in several villages in Pingnan, northeastern Fujian, from 2008 to 2011, to examine the use of texts in rural China during the imperial period. The discussion focuses on the texts produced by local people and used locally. The central theme of the dissertation is to contextualize the rise of textual culture and the spread literate mentality in a marginal society, and explore the relationship between text and society. The dissertation consists of two major parts. Part I covers the period when Pingnan was the northern part of Gutian County, and Part II covers the period around and after the establishment of Pingnan County in 1734.

Part I consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 traces the early textual practices in northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period, and suggests a local perspective of textual culture. Chapter 2 discusses the establishment of official documentation system in the early Ming and its influence on local communities and the production of local texts. Chapter 3 uses a case of a rising family in the late Ming to illustrate the use of textual construction to promote one's social and cultural status.

Part II consists of four chapters and each chapter investigates the use of texts in one realm of village life. Chapter 4 starts with the penetration of genealogy compilation and the transformation of social structure. Chapter 5 discusses the political background for the proliferation of stone stelae and other "texts for public display." Chapter 6 examines various

kinds of textual materials used in economic activities, from managing lineage properties to land-exchanges and long-distant trades. Chapter 7 explores the creation within the transmission of ritual texts and their responses to the changing requirement of ritual performance.

In the conclusion, this dissertation discusses the significance of textual culture in the general transformations and social integrations in northeastern Fujian, and also reconsiders the question of “literacy” in the context of local society.

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Introduction

We live in a world of texts. Texts are the bridges allowing us to access and navigate our complex world. Even before getting up in the morning, many of us check our e-mail and review various social networks through which we communicate with our colleagues and friends across the globe. We watch the news and monitor weather forecasts before leaving the house to know how to prepare for the day ahead. When we drive on the street, the signs along the roads tell us the direction. We buy our morning coffee with cash printed with monetary values or with a credit card, which, after our name is signed, will present us with a contract that we have made with our bank. We can swipe an id card to gain access to a building at a university and permission is granted because our information has been registered in the university's records. And now we sit down and read this dissertation. The author, a foreign student, has a passport issued by the government where he is registered as a citizen and has obtained a visa issued by another government after the exchanges of still more documents that provide assurances that this individual will not be a threat to the safety of the state.

It is a typical morning, and almost all the regularities are managed by different forms of texts: written documents, painted public signs, handwritten signatures, printed paper money, digital records and information. Using these texts, we interact with different institutions (governments, financial agents, mass media, markets, workplaces) and persons (families, friends, colleagues, strangers) who may be standing right next to us or on the

other side of the earth. We are so familiar with these routines that we rarely think about what supports them: functional operations, standard procedures, predictable responses, consent, and the communication of information. All of these motions involve various forms of texts.

Is the omnipresence of texts a feature of “modern society”? Raymond Williams argues that a long revolution in culture transpired along with industrial and democratic revolutions in British society from the late eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Closely correlated with the other two, this “cultural revolution”—or revolution of communication—was marked by mass education, growth of the reading public, burgeoning of the popular press, and standardization of languages.¹ To Ernest Gellner, the key distinction between “agro-literate society” and modern “industrial society” is that an industrial economy requires a high degree of cultural homogeneity and impersonal, context-free communications; by contrast, in pre-modern society, literacy was limited, cultures were diverse, and professions were inherited.² While Williams focuses on the “cultural” and Gellner addresses the “socio-economic,” both insist that changing modes of communication are fundamental to our current “modern” society.

Similar idea influences how some scholars interpret “literacy” and its link to the degree of modernity. To these scholars, high literacy means more people in the society can apprehend new technologies and skills quickly and communicate with one another easily. The former one makes them good workers in an industrialized society; the latter one makes

¹ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).

² Ernest Gellner, *Nation and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

them good citizens in a democratic (and usually nationalist) state. For example, in her *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*, so far the only book on literacy in late imperial China,³ Evelyn Rawski compares the literacy rate in Qing China with those of European countries and Japan, where “literacy rates are...taken as an indicator of attitudinal and cultural transformations that were conducive to industrialization,” and concludes that:

Printing and literacy in China marched hand in hand with the evolution of economic and social institutions. The real development of local schools, the expansion of printing, and the rise of popular literature, together with the heightening of social mobility, all began in Ming times. When we consider the implications of these trends, it is hard to describe China as anything but an advanced, complex society, not stagnant but developing in a manner that requires further analysis and examination. From this perspective, China was remarkably modern in many respects.⁴

Although modernity as a universal framework, as well as the implication of modernization behind literacy, has been challenged since the 1980s, how the modes of communication interact with social or cultural structures is still an important question. Instead of proving the grand thesis of historical periodization, scholars now investigate this topic in various ways, and tend to turn from seeking the universal process of cultural homogenization to revealing the more complicated cultural creations under the tension between homogenization and diversification.

³ More and more scholars of ancient Chinese history are interested in the issue of literacy in ancient China. In addition to ancient Classics and linguistic evidence, many use archaeological findings to support their arguments on the role of literacy in different aspects of ancient Chinese society. Taiwanese scholar Hsin Yi-tien 邢義田 and Japanese scholar Tomiya Itaru 富谷至 are the leading scholars on this issue. Recently, a group of scholars organized a seminar devoted to literacy in ancient China, and published the first collected essays on this issue in English. See Li Feng and David Prager Branner eds., *Writing and Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2011).

⁴ Evelyn Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 149, 151.

In keeping with this trend, the theme of this dissertation—the use of texts in rural China during the late imperial period—considers relationships between communication and society. While in the field of late imperial China, urban areas are taken as the birthplace of most economic, social, and cultural transformations, very little is known about what transpired in the countryside. Many studies concentrate on situations in core areas, such as the commercial towns in the Lower Yangtze Delta, fewer concern cases in villages. My exploration of texts in Chinese villages is an attempt to close this gap by examining the role of texts in the process of social cohesion and cultural invention at the local level during late imperial China. In the vast and complicated society that we may view as “China,” if there were changes from urban areas, how did these changes come to villages and how did villages react to them? In the process of diffusion and appropriation, written texts played important roles, which have yet to be systematically examined.

To make the discussion more concrete, this dissertation takes villages located in the northeastern Fujian mountains as a case study. This dissertation reconstructs the “textual landscape” of northeastern Fujian by exploring the kinds of texts local people owned, the ways in which they created, circulated, and used these texts, and the significance of textual practices in the society. This entails analyzing the interactions between text and society in their specific historical circumstance. The overall theme behind this exploration is the process of textualization and the establishment of literate mentality. In this process, the written word and its vehicles gradually penetrate various facets of local life through this process, which also transforms people’s mentality. Even in villages, texts are not merely objects that reflect social reality, but instruments of a transformative social practice that

influences the configuration of social order and cultural structure. This process is not only a “modern” and “urban” phenomenon, but also an integral part of villagers’ lives.

From History of the Book to History of the Text

Studies in the field of the history of the book and reading are particularly important in any exploration of the history of textual communication. In addition to the long tradition of bibliographical studies, this multi-disciplinary field embraces work by scholars of intellectual history, art history, social history, legal history, history of science, literary criticism, and sociology. Studies in this field are interested in looking closely at different aspects associated with books, including the inner structure of books, their production, circulation and reception. In addition to the information and ideas it contains, a book is also a physical object which can be handled and needs to be distributed. In the study of book history, not only the content of a particular book, but also its format, its materiality, its circulation, and its reception are all important aspects of a full examination.⁵

Although there is also a long tradition of Chinese bibliographic studies, the history of the book and reading has emerged as an important branch in Chinese history since the late 1990s, marked by a special issue, “Publishing and the Print Culture in Late Imperial China” in *Late Imperial China* in 1996.⁶ As the title of this issue suggests, the emergence of this field in Chinese history was initiated by the concept of “print culture,” which was

⁵ See Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books,” *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990) and Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁶ “Special Issue: Publishing and the Print Culture in Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China* 17.1 (1996).

used to explain the history of the book in the West.⁷ The technological approach to studying Chinese printing started early,⁸ but importation of the concept of print culture into established Chinese fields of study re-ignited scholarly interests in China's printing tradition and printed books. Some scholars have concentrated on the dynamics of early printed books during the Song dynasty, but more attention has been paid to the flourishing of printed books during the late Ming.⁹ While earlier studies concentrate on collections of scholars or literati,¹⁰ later studies have expanded to consider popular publication and commercial imprints.¹¹

However, although studies in the field of Chinese book history have greatly expanded our knowledge of Chinese books, several aspects remain barely touched by current scholarship. First of all, almost all the studies are limited to printed books, especially imprints for commercial and scholarly purposes. Many scholars agree on the importance of manuscripts and hand-copies in circulation during the late imperial period,¹²

⁷ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). The argument proposing printing as a primary "agent of change" in Europe during the early modern era has been challenged, but it was still new when it first came to the field of Chinese history in the late 1990s.

⁸ See T. F. Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward* (New York: Columbia University, 1925) and Sun Yuxiu 孫毓修, *Zhongguo diaoban yuanliu kao* 中國雕版源流考 (Taipei: Chenwen, 1978, first published at 1927).

⁹ See Lucile Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th–17th centuries)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002) and Cynthia Brokaw and Chow Kai-wing ed., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Chow Kai-wing, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Joseph McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006)

¹¹ Cynthia Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: the Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹² McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book*, 44–47.

but most studies still focus on printed books, which are more collectable and contain more information about their production and circulation. Related to the focus on printed books is an emphasis on commercial purposes. Studies on Chinese print culture argue that printed books became commodities in China either during the Song or during the late Ming, depending on the periods that the scholar studies, and link the spread of books to the flourishing market economy to both periods. However, many printed books were not commercially produced and distributed, such as religious booklets and most local gazetteers, and many printed books, which were initially commercially produced, were transmitted by means of individually produced hand-copies. This process applies to most manuals and exemplars I found in the villages in northeastern Fujian. Much of the content of these manuals came from printed books that had been repeatedly copied by hand.

Moreover, if we take “book” as one specific form of textual expression, many texts are not circulated in the form of book. As a form of textual expression, the book is significant in several aspects. It is formal, systematic, and commercially distributed with ease. However, if we walk into the villages, the texts we encounter would be quite different. Throughout most of history, books were hardly the most important form of texts in Chinese villages. And just because books were rarely available in some very remote or tiny villages, this does not mean that people there did not have access to textual materials. Whether in towns or in villages, texts were produced and circulated not only in the form of non-printed book, such as handwritten genealogies, account books, hand-copied manuals, and ritual registers, but also in the form of non-book, such as land contracts, licenses, receipts, poster, gatepost couplets, ritual memorials, and “divine placards.” Sometimes the text did not have to be written on paper: it could be an inscription carved on stone tablet, wooden plaque, or

memorial arch; it could be words painted on a wall, a pillar or the beam of a building or a bridge; it could be a seal printed on contracts, promissory notes or talismans.

Compared to these various forms, the audience for book format was limited to a smaller educated group. This situation is more apparent in the villages, where few would have been highly literate, and few would have been willing to spend their money on buying printed books. Therefore, to investigate the role of texts in rural China, it is necessary to extend our scope beyond textual materials in book form to all possible forms of textual expression. Since information and ideas are disseminated in various forms of texts, a “history of texts” foregrounds the flexible modes of textual communication in rural China.

From History of Reading to History of Textual Practices

Although historians usually pay more attention to the content of texts, the variety of forms of texts deserves more reflection. Every form has its particular attributes. Some are intended for public display; others are meant to be accessible only to a limited audience or privately read. Some are made to be preserved for a long period of time; others are easily erased or written on ephemeral surfaces. Some deliver complicated information; others contain cryptic symbols or scripts that are unreadable. These attributes are related to the different purposes of texts, and determine how these texts are produced, circulated, and preserved.

In a further step, we have to explore the relationship between content and form. Why is it that the particular content of some texts has to be presented in a particular form while other types of content must be presented in other forms? To consider this question, we

could start by examining cases in which the same textual content appears in different forms. For example, some official orders from local government were inscribed on stone tablets and some were not. Why was a particular order singled out for inscription, since we know it was considerably more expensive to establish a stone tablet than to post an announcement on a wall? The same textual content in a stone inscription, which could be an official order, an agreement among villages or lineages, or a memorial essay for the establishment of certain building, are often recorded in different vehicles—such as, contracts, local gazetteers, genealogies, and personal literary collections. How can we interpret this effort to reproduce the same—though sometimes not exactly the same—content in different forms? What is the difference that requires their presentation in one form rather than another? Who are the intended readers/receivers, and how do these texts reach to them? Considering this relationship between content and form not only helps us to understand the meaning of a particular text, but also the meaning these different forms hold for a local community.

To expand our scope to these diverse forms also changes our perception of “textual practice.” An important development in the field of book history is the exploration of the history of reading. A book does not generate meanings by itself. To be “meaningful,” a book has to be read by a reader. There are different ways to read a book in different eras, and different readers may read the same book differently.¹³ The dynamic history of reading helps up to discover the life of a text, and its influence on a particular society: a

¹³ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., Lydia G. Cochrane trans., *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

book is not a dead object, but something that has the ability to generate different meanings depending how it is read.

Compared to the reading of books, these alternative textual forms have different ways to generate meanings, and reading is not the only way that a text could be used. For example, a land contract is not made to be read character by character. Many conventional terms are not necessarily fully understood by those who signed the contract or even by the person who produced the text of the contract. However, a contract is still meaningful as the textual evidence of land transaction and needs to be carefully preserved. In many instances, the most important aspect of a text is not being read—some texts are even intentionally not being read (at least by human beings), such as the notes put into the wooden statues of Buddha while they were made. Rather than serving as reading material, texts often functioned as proof of negotiations, records of facts, mementos of events, or symbols of authority. The significance of the form of a text is as important as its content.

When we read a printed book, we usually read the final product—an object that has been written by an author, published by a publisher and acquired by a reader. The history of reading emphasizes the final stage of the long process of textual circulation; in this final stage, the content of texts is absorbed by readers and becomes integrated with their thoughts and ideas. For local texts produced in villages, depending on their forms, the most meaningful stage is not always the period after the texts have been produced. Sometimes the most meaningful stage is the process toward their production. For example, a genealogy is not a text that people often read. The most important stage is the negotiation process during its compilation, including deciding who can be recorded in the genealogy and who cannot, who belongs to which branch, and how far the common ancestor should

be traced. A genealogy is thus a textual compilation of these negotiations among the members within a descent group. Sometimes the most important stage is the moment when texts are produced. For example, in many Daoist ceremonies, the rituals of writing and reading play the central role. The most important stage is when ritual texts are written, read, or burned during the ritual. In this situation, a text is a live performance.

Because of these different ways that make texts meaningful, the focus on reading has to be replaced with the concept of “textual practices,” which include all the different ways that a text can be used. It has been stressed that a text is not a static object; a text is a series of practices, from its production, its performance, its preservation, to its destruction. The concept of textual practices is better illustrated in villages, where most people cannot read but are still influenced by or interact with various kinds of texts. Therefore, the question of literacy takes on a different kind of meaning. We often assume that only people with a certain degree of literacy can “use” a text; however, even the life of illiterate people is full of different genres of texts. What we need to do is put these dynamic practices back into their local contexts and historical circumstances, study the people and institutions that are related to these practices and how they are able to be influential.

From Local History to History of Local Textual Practices

Texts and their practices are embedded in the local society where they are produced or used. How the connection between texts and society is constructed is the central topic of this dissertation.

In recent years, studies of Chinese local society in the late imperial period have greatly benefited from the discovery of local documents. Certainly, local documents have been used in historical studies since the early twentieth century, but increasing numbers of documents have been unearthed since China began to open up in the late 1980s. Not only scholars, but also antique dealers and enthusiastic local officials of cultural departments have lined up to collect, trade, and publish local documents. Local documents in libraries, archives, and museums are gradually becoming accessible to researchers as are many documents privately held by collectors and villagers.

These documents reveal different views of local society. In the past, our knowledge of Chinese local society mainly came from official gazetteers and writings from local officials and literati. Both were positioned as either supervisors or observers of most local affairs; because of the nature of these materials, the main theme of these studies was how the government, in alliance with local elites, controlled the order of local society. However, various recently discovered documents—such as genealogies, contracts or account books—provide first-hand sources about many different facets of local society.

Arguably, the most significant achievement in the past decade in Chinese social history during the late imperial period has been demonstrating the complicated and dynamic processes of social construction in local society. These documents disclose the details of the formation and operation of various social organizations, such as lineages, *lijia*, religious communities (or ritual alliances), corporations, charity or relief societies, and associations of fellow provincials. Unlike the conventional model of one-dimensional “local elites and their dominance,” recent studies depict an organic picture. On the one hand, most social entities were organized by certain general criteria; on the other hand,

their practices in local society were affected by local circumstances and their interactions with other social realms. The best examples so far come from studies of lineage organizations. Although lineages were by and large organized by the general principles of kinship, studies reveal the diversity of local practices, which were influenced by their socio-economic status, local ethnic relationships, state policy or local administration, religious or ritual traditions, business collaboration, and their competition with other social groups.¹⁴ The compositions and operations of those we view as lineages varied, and were respectively channeled by their local conditions.

The deeper understanding of lineage organizations from local perspectives greatly benefits by the rediscovery of the local texts. The abundance of lineage-related documents is one of the main reasons that the diversity of lineages can be fully represented. Different kinds of genealogies, documents of house dividing, registers of ritual, registers of lineage property, registers of ancestral graves, stone inscriptions of ancestral shrines or temples, land or business contracts, official registers of household, family regulations or compacts all provide different facets of lineage building and challenge the orthodox definition of kinship-based lineages.¹⁵ However, while perusing local texts and reaching deeper into local history, historians gradually have realized the limit of textual materials. Not only are many aspects not fully represented in written texts—so that local historians have to consult with other non-textual materials, such as visual evidence, artifacts and oral histories—but

¹⁴ See Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) and David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ The most successful case to use various kinds of documents and depict a dynamic circle of lineage transformation should be: Zheng Zhenman, trans. by Michael Szonyi, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

also intended or unintended fabrication in written texts blurs the line between ideal representations and historical facts. Historians have to read between the lines and take the authors' intentions into account.

The role of local texts is therefore intriguing. On the one hand, they are the primary sources from which we collect scattered images of local society in the past. On the other hand, they were also used in practical ways by local people when they were made. Rather than being neutral representations, these texts were created for specific purposes and had particular functions. Not only why they were produced, but also why they were preserved till now influence how we interpret these texts. Bearing this in mind, when we try to study local history on the basis of these texts, we also have to investigate the mechanism of their production, so that we can evaluate the credibility of the contents: whether this text was an agenda, a record, an intended fabrication, or a reconstruction of the historical past.

In a further step, the establishment of this mechanism is itself an important historical process. When and how different genres of texts were created, how these texts were used, and how the practices of these texts interacted with different aspects of local society are the main questions that a local historian has to consider. To answer these questions, we have to reconstruct local history—a coherent historical narrative based on textual materials—and at the same time investigate the uses of these texts in the historical contexts of this society. This “double reconstruction” requires a careful inspection of textuality and a deep sense of reflexivity.

As anthropologists inspect the relationships between their research objects and the establishment of anthropological knowledge, exploring the nature of the materials that we collect for a historical study also helps us to reconsider the nature of our knowledge.

Instead of writing a local history, this dissertation explores the possibility for writing a history of local textual practices and reviews the establishment of our knowledge of local history.



Map 1 Fujian Province, Qing Dynasty



Map 2 Pingnan County – Waters and Landscape

Location: Margin of the Empire

To narrow the scope of research and make it a concrete case, this dissertation uses cases from several villages in northeastern Fujian. Because of its mountainous landscape and environmental conditions, northeastern Fujian is a relatively poor region in southeastern China. Settled in river valleys and narrow coastal plains, most of its inhabitants made their living as farmers, fishermen, and hunters. Ever since the northern Han Chinese tried to expand their power to the southeastern coast, the city of Fuzhou,

which is located just to the south of the region, has served as the administrative center of Fujian. However, cultural, economic, and social development in northeastern Fujian, particularly in the eyes of the officials, critically lagged behind the rest of the province.

In this vast region of northeastern Fujian, I begin my research in Pingnan 屏南 County, one of the places I visited in summer 2008. Pingnan, which administratively was formerly the northern part of Gutian 古田 County, was promoted to the status of county in the early eighteenth century, when the governor of Fujian suggested to the Yongzheng emperor that this change would be a further step toward gaining control of the mountainous part of Fujian. However, this region, already then famous as a refuge of outlaws, remained on the margin of political administration. The name of this county rarely appears in the *Veritable Records*; after it received its promotion to the status of a county, it received very little imperial attention.

The marginality of Pingnan is evident in several aspects. Geographically, Pingnan is set amidst the deep Jiufeng 驚峰 mountain range and not easy to access. The modern investigation indicates that only 3.6% of the Pingnan territories are river valleys and basins.¹⁶ No wonder that a booklet written by a county magistrate of Pingnan in 1945 uses this opening sentence to describe it: “The first thing that came to my mind as I first arrived here was ‘there is no more than two feet of flat land in the county.’”¹⁷ The entire area of Pingnan is situated on the expanse between the Huotong River 霍童溪 and the Gutian River 古田溪, which is a branch of the Min River 閩江 (map 2). People settled along the

¹⁶ *Pingnan xianzhi* 屏南縣志 (Beijing: Fangzhi, 1999), 22.

¹⁷ Wang Huang 王滉, *Pingzheng cuotang* 屏政脞談 (Gutian: Huawen, 1944), 1.

small basins and narrow valleys along several unnavigable upper branches of these rivers. The settlements are small and relatively isolated from one another. According to the official records from the 1730s when Pingnan was separated from Gutian, of the 237 villages in official records, about one-quarter had less than ten registered households, and the median was twenty households (Chart 1). Only twelve villages had more than one hundred households, and so-called “village clusters” or towns on plains were rare in Pingnan.¹⁸ The structure of the settlement distribution and the size of settlements influenced how local society was organized.

Chart 1 Number of households in each village, 1730s¹⁹

| households | 1-10 | 11-50 | 51-100 | 101-150 | 151-200 | 351-400 | total |
|------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| number | 60 | 133 | 31 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 237 |
| ratio | 25.3% | 56.1% | 13.1% | 3.8% | 1.3% | 0.4% | |

Because of its mountainous landscape and its location, Pingnan was and is also economically marginal. The same twentieth-century county magistrate mentioned above used homonyms of its place name to describe Pingnan as “poor” (*pin* 貧) and “difficult (to access)” (*nan* 難).²⁰ Until several years ago, Pingnan was still officially recognized as one of the six “poor counties” in Fujian Province. Because of its landscape, arable lands in Pingnan are scattered and small. Even in 1948, 86.8% of lands were officially categorized as “wasted plains and wasted mountains.”²¹ The cold and humid weather worsened its agricultural production, and farmers could only have one harvest each year—most

¹⁸ According to the records, a village had four hundred households. However, judging from its location and its current condition, this number seems wrong.

¹⁹ The data come from *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi* 乾隆屏南縣志, 4/16-30.

²⁰ Wang Huang, *Pingzheng cuotang*, 1.

²¹ *Pingnan xian tongji shouce* 屏南縣統計手冊, (Pingnan: Pingnan xian zhengfu tongji shi, 1948), 41

farmlands in southern China could produce two to three harvests.²² This is also the reason for the smaller size of settlements. Moreover, Pingnan is remote from the main transportation routes. Before the nineteenth century, there was no market town in Pingnan, and porters transported commodities, such as salt and seafood, from the towns in lower river valleys and coastal plains. In late imperial China, merchants competed for control of the salt monopoly, which usually generated huge profits. However, in Pingnan, no merchant was willing to do business in this region, so that the government permitted local residents to buy salt as individuals in the market towns in neighboring counties.²³ However, lack of agricultural production does not mean a lack of economic activities. During the late imperial period, immigrants came to Pingnan to take advantage of natural resources, such as timber, iron, and silver, and since the mid-nineteenth century, after Fuzhou became a treaty port for foreign trade, Pingnan became an important locus of tea production.

Politically, Pingnan was also marginal in terms of official administration. Before it was separated from Gutian in 1736, Pingnan was the untamed part of Gutian. This mountainous region was on the border of three prefectures (Jianyang 建陽, Jianning 建寧 and Fuzhou, see Map 1), which situated it at a distance from the supervision of all three prefects—the centers of local administrations. When this region appeared on official records, it was usually because of local rebellions caused by people that the local government could not fully control, such as bandits, migrant miners, unregistered immigrants, or devotees of local cults, such as “vegans.” However, these so-called

²² *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi* 乾隆屏南縣志, 5/1a.

²³ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 5/23-25a.

“rebellions” were usually serious local conflicts that transpired when the powerless government failed to maintain local order. Rectifying the absence of official powers was possible only after the establishment of Pingnan County, which caused a series of transformations in its political and social structures.

Unlike many regions that scholars have studied, Pingnan is geographically, economically, politically marginal. These marginal positions also introduced its marginality in mainstream culture. Local officials called Pingnan residents “barbarians” in different contexts. In an official gazetteer, Pingnan people were described as “no different from raw *miao*” (與生苗無異), and in a litigation, a defendant from Pingnan was called an “old barbarian” (*lao manzi* 老蠻子) by the official.²⁴ Many local customs, such as swidden agriculture or cremation, were regarded as vulgar, as a county magistrate suggests in his poem: “the vulgar customs here are close to those of *miao* and *yao*.” (薄俗近苗獠)²⁵ In addition to these pejorative terms, detachment from the mainstream culture is also evident in the fact that no one had ever attained an official degree through civil examinations in this region before the county was established. Since the system of civil examinations was an important institution to build the connection between the empire and its local subjects through the accumulation of cultural capital, the lack of degree holders suggests detachment both politically and culturally from the empire.

A decisive transformation in Pingnan started in the early eighteenth century, when the local order was rebuilt after the chaos of dynastic transition and the Rebellion of Three

²⁴ Shen Zhong 沈鍾, “Zhi Ping guanjian 治屏管見,” *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 4a; *Boyuan supu yinben* 柏源蘇譜印本, 15.

²⁵ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 5/3b.

Feudatories, and a new county government was established by the empire. The new administrative unit restored the local administration, and created the new quota of government students (*shengyuan* 生員) for Pingnan residents. These students later became leaders who were able to create both political and cultural bonds with the new regime. There was also a revival of economic activities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as foreign trade further integrated the regional and global markets.

In other words, in the case of Pingnan, we can observe the process through which a geographically marginal community became politically, economically, and culturally integrated into a greater community. During this process, textual practices played an important role. Although the volume of textual materials is greater in core areas, such as the towns in the Lower Yangtze Delta, the process of integration happened much earlier in these areas, and it is more difficult to study the role of textual practices in these complicated communities. By contrast, in peripheral communities, where the process of integration was late and the textual materials are relatively simple, it is easier to observe the evolution of textual practices, especially with respect to the development of textual culture and literate mentality.

However, although the marginality of this community is a key attribute and the implicit theme of this dissertation is the process of integration through texts, this does not mean that this community was static and isolated from the beginning. Although Pingnan, or northern Gutian, is situated on deep mountains and along rivers that are unnavigable, communications between Pingnan and other inland mountains, lowland valleys or coastal plains, were frequent, and people moved in and out of this region. Limited agricultural production meant that people had to look for other resources to support their and their

descendants' lives. Many went deep into the mountains and looked for new lands to open. Others became migrant workers who travelled around for new jobs. While most of our textual materials came from those who settled down and most official records only recognize settlers, those "not being governed" were on the same stage. Our investigation of textualization, to some extent, reveals mostly the lives of those who were on the way of integration and leaves aside a certain number of people who kept distance from larger political, cultural, or economic entities.

Moreover, although the term "process" is often highlighted, it does not mean that there was only one process or that this process was linear or even evolutionary. The development of textualization was uneven, often punctuated or accelerated by certain events, and sometimes even degraded during a disturbing era. The influences from the different layers of communities also directed this process in various ways. Local officials assigned by the court, immigrants from neighboring counties, soldiers of garrisons or military farms sent by the military institutions, candidates of civil examination going back and forth between native villages and provincial capitals, merchants from another towns, and missionaries from another countries, all brought in new cultural elements and different texts. Instead of a one-dimensional, universal process, textualization was rather diverse and conditional.



Map 3 Pingnan County - Villages and Sectors²⁶

Sources: Local Texts

The primary sources for this dissertation are the textual materials I collected in Pingnan from 2008 to 2011. A small number of them came from the Fujian Provincial Library, and some of them were preserved in Pingnan Archives or other local offices, but the main body of these texts was collected from villages. Of course, it is impossible to visit

²⁶ Only villages mentioned in the dissertation are noted in this map. The boundaries of sectors (*du* 都) are drawn by myself according to the list of villages in the Qianlong Gazetteer of Pingnan. The numbers in brackets were the new codes given to each sector after Pingnan were separated from Gutian at the end of the Yongzheng reign, and the number outside the brackets were the old codes used when Pingnan was still a part of Gutian county. However, the old codes sometimes appeared in the documents compiled after the separation. See *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 4/16-30.

all the villages in Pingnan, even though it is a small county and not very populated.²⁷ During my stay in Pingnan, I visited more than twenty villages. Although the similarities among these villages are apparent, every village has its own history, and the conditions of the preservation of local texts are also different. Some villages keep more textual materials from the past; some do not. Some villages are particularly rich in one specific genre, but none can preserve all kinds of them. The initial plan was focused on one single village and weaving the texts into its local history. Eventually, this dissertation is built upon the materials from several different villages, but four villages, Zheyang 浙洋, Fenglin 鳳林, Boyuan 柏源 and Ruiyun 瑞雲 play the main role in the first part, and the three villages of Jixia 漈下, Jitou 漈頭, and Longtan 龍潭, plus the new county seat, Shuangxi 雙溪, take center stage in the second part. Some minor cases are from Guxia 古廈, Gantang 甘棠, Menli 門裡, Badi 巴地 and others. (Map 3)

The richness of textual materials in Chinese villages is greatly underestimated. It is usually assumed that because of the low literacy rate in rural area, texts were not important in village life; it is also assumed that, even though people used texts during the late imperial period, almost all of them were destroyed during wars and the even more destructive Cultural Revolution. However, in my Pingnan experience, many texts compiled during the late imperial period can still be found in villages. The earliest texts I found can be traced to the early seventeenth century, and most of them were produced during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

²⁷ The area of Pingnan is 1,485 km², much smaller than the smallest American state (which is Rhode Island and 4,002 km²). The population of Pingnan County was 137,724 in 2010, which is more than that of Cambridge, Massachusetts but less than Springfield, Massachusetts.

In these villages I found a wide range of genres of texts. Some genres are particularly copious. For example, more than one thousand one hundred contracts were found in Pingnan. They are either privately preserved by villagers or were collected by the local government during the land reform in 1950s and now are kept by the local office. Some are rare or even absent. For example, although I found several scripts of local drama, I did not find any novels, short stories, or similar writing for leisure reading. Both the lack of certain genres and the abundance of certain genres are significant. The lack of leisure reading, for instance, can be interpreted as: first, in this less “cultural” and poor region, if a book was needed, villagers tended to buy or copy texts with practical value, such as household encyclopedia or manuals and not leisure readings; or, second, during the Cultural Revolution when books were censored and confiscated, if villagers managed to secretly keep some books, they usually chose to keep books of practical knowledge—not novels or short stories that had content that usually was regarded as “feudal,” “backward,” and “evil.” Whether a choice concerned an issue of preservation or an issue of historical development has to be carefully investigated. However, although scholars of local texts usually list all genres of texts and evenly treat them as the essential components of a local textual system, the situation in Pingnan villages suggests that these genres did not necessarily have an equal status in each village.

Instead of writing a comprehensive history of all genres of local texts, this dissertation focuses on texts that were locally produced. Most of these texts were produced by local people, who were experts, professional specialists, or simply villagers who knew how to write. A small portion of these texts were produced by individuals invited from other places, but the process of production took place in Pingnan and the texts were made

for Pingnan people. For example, villagers sometimes invited experts from Fuzhou or other counties to compile genealogies for them and occasionally hired outside craftsmen to carve stone inscriptions. In most cases, local compilers of texts also had to acquire knowledge or information outside of Pingnan. For example, individuals from Pingnan would look for a standard exemplar to write a contract and ritual specialists copied their manuals from sources beyond Pingnan. However, these texts were all locally produced for local people and closely connected to the local community from start to finish.

Many texts, though found in Pingnan, are excluded from my dissertation. Their exclusion does not mean they are less important: actually these materials, such as printed books, local gazetteers, and literary writings, deserve another dissertation. There was no printing industry in Pingnan during the imperial era, so that people bought printed books made in Fuzhou, Quanzhou, Sibao 四堡, and even Shanghai. These books provided a vehicle for local textual culture to communicate with a large one. Many of these books, such as writing aids and household manuals, though not locally produced, provided the cultural resources for local people to produce their own texts.²⁸

Although Pingnan is a young county, local gazetteers were constantly revised. The first one was compiled by its first county magistrate Shen Zhong 沈鍾 in 1740, and then expanded, revised or recompiled in 1752, 1826, 1908, 1920, 1941, and 1999. Although an editorial board of local gentry was established, the first gazetteer was certainly compiled by the county magistrate who came from Changzhou 常州, the center of Chinese literati culture. Local gentry involved more in later editions after a gentry stratum was established. Besides the 1752 version, which was printed from woodblocks, and the modern 1999

²⁸ Cynthia Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture*, 321-475.

version, which was printed with movable type, the rest were all hand-copied. These local gazetteers provide rich information about this county from the perspective of local officials and gentry, which becomes the frame through which we know about this region as an administrative unit. The unique process of gazetteer compilation is an important topic, especially with respect to the aspect of the competitive and corporative relationships between local gentry and officials in making textual representations of a community. This process deserves special attention but cannot be fully discussed in this dissertation.²⁹

In many towns in China, local literati published their own literary writings. Collections of poems were most popular, and some literati published trivial notes and collected essays. Usually these literary writings contain many details about their communities. Poems and trivial notes describe local scenery or customs; collected essays include many written for local events or local elite networks, such as biographies of local gentry, prefaces to genealogies, eulogies for funerals, and memorial essays for the establishment of temples or shrines. Even though these literary writings were not published, such manuscripts were circulated among literati. However, in Pingnan, there are very few examples of such writings before the early twentieth century. It was only during the Early Republican era that printed collections of poems started to circulate among local literati and local officials as a field to express their literary tastes and develop their own identity.

²⁹ Joseph Dennis uses the cases from Zhejiang to explore the production of local gazetteers during the Ming. See Joseph Dennis, "Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Histories in Ming China" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Minnesota, 2004).

Plan of the Dissertation

Except for these books, gazetteers, and literary collections, this dissertation attempts to investigate the practices of locally-produced texts and their relationships to local communities during the late imperial period; particular attention will be paid to the penetration of different kinds of textual materials into different realms of village life. Villagers not only received texts from outside, but also actively produced their own texts. To better illustrate the long-term development, the dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part traces the early use of texts in northern Gutian before the end of the Ming dynasty, when Pingnan comprised the northern part of Gutian County. The second part examines the penetration of different kinds of texts into Pingnan society from the restoration of local order during the early eighteenth century, to the early twentieth century and the demise of the last Chinese empire.

The first part consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 traces the early textual practices in northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period. Although early texts did not survive, reconstructed descriptions reveal some aspects of textual practices during this period. By using a case involving lineage building and lineage documents, this chapter reconsiders the elite model of textual production, and suggests a perspective from below.

Chapters 2 and 3 are based on transformations during the Ming dynasty. On the one hand, the bureaucratization of local administration introduced various kinds of documents and records to re-categorize and mobilize human powers and economic resources in local society. Although official efforts had their limits, written documents and the concept of documentation were widely disseminated at the county level and below. On the other hand, local people, including original settlers and new immigrants, were directly confronted with

bureaucratic operations, and had to develop various strategies to interact with local government bureaucracies. Many texts produced by local people during the Ming were created to respond to official interventions or to promote themselves using official powers. They not only learned from the formats of official documents but also introduced new genres from outside their communities. Chapter 2 discusses this transformation from the perspective of local government, and Chapter 3 considers the perspective of local families.

The second part consists of four chapters, covering the overall transformation from the early eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. During these two hundred years, the local power structures in Pingnan changed vastly; at the same time, texts further penetrated into different layers of society. While transformations in different realms interlocked with one another, in each realm, we can observe the influence of different genres of texts.

Chapter 4 starts with the change in social realm. From the early eighteenth century, local order was reconstructed from the chaos of dynastic transition. “Lineage” became the most important institution that local family used to organize themselves. Lineage documents played an important role in these organizational processes, and the “revival” of genealogy compilation was particularly a significant phenomenon in local textual production. This chapter traces the popularization of genealogy compilation and its significance

The rise of lineage organization was deeply encouraged by the establishment of Pingnan County. This new county also transformed the culture in the political realm. Political authority was reified with the open display of texts in public spaces. The physical presence of these texts—including stone inscriptions, wooden plaques and memorial

arches—started in the new county seat and reached to villages. This method of “displaying power” was gradually learned by local families, who used the same mechanism to create public spaces and declare their dominant status. Chapter 5 examines these public texts and the public spaces they created.

The restoration of economic order followed the restoration of social and political order. The economic structure of Pingnan further transformed throughout the nineteenth century when two ports in northeastern Fujian were opened under the foreign pressures and Pingnan was integrated into regional, national and global market. During these processes, various written documents were used to regulate the economic exchanges inside lineage organizations and in the open market. These documents and records not only directed the mode of exchanges, but also made economic behavior predictable and manageable, which permitted local people to invest their assets and seek maximum profit. Chapter 6 surveys various kinds of texts used in economic activities, from documents of house dividing, registers of lineage properties, land contracts, and account books to promissory notes.

Chapter 7 turns the focus to the ritual realm and studies texts used in rituals. It is often assumed that rituals are repeatable and almost unchanged. By perusing ritual texts I collected in Pingnan, I discuss the various roles of texts in ritual performance. Generally texts provide a “tradition” to authorize rituals; however, in the process of editing, collecting, and performing, ritual specialists continually adjust ritual texts to accommodate current needs.

In the first part of the dissertation, the central theme is how a group of people on the margin of the empire used written texts as strategies to manage interactions with different groups of people and different social institutions: the state was apparently an important one.

In the second part, this community was further integrated into a larger entity in different realms. On the one hand, we may say that texts penetrated into local society during the process of social, political, economic and cultural integrations. On the other hand, we see that local people took these textual practices in different directions. In many cases, powerful families or individuals used texts to maintain their dominance, promote their status, or compete with one another in the course of social of integration. However, minor families or individuals also learned the knowledge and skills of textual manipulation and changes their lives. In the conclusion, I will further discuss the mechanism of textual production and the significance of textualization for a marginal community.

Part I

Northern Gutian:

Tigers and Panthers in Mountains,

the 11th to the 17th Century

The first County Magistrate of Pingnan, Shen Zhong, took this new position in 1736, the first year of the Qianlong Emperor's reign. Shen Zhong's hometown was Changzhou, which was at the heart of Chinese literati culture. Before being appointed to this new county, he was the county magistrate of another Fujian mountain county, and earned the reputation of being capable. This was probably the reason why he was appointed to this new county.

To Shen Zhong, administering in this new county was difficult and he left this position three years later because of a corruption accusation from some local opponents.¹ In his article, "My Humble Opinion on the Administration of Pingnan," he described the situation when he first arrived here: "Pingnan was far away from Gutian and the official administration could not reach here. Residents here were like tigers and panthers in mountains. Ignorant people were only afraid that they could not free themselves from the official institutions." In another paragraph, he said: "although Pingnan was separated from

¹ After being dismissed from this post, he still stayed in Pingnan to finish the compilation of the first Pingnan gazetteer, which started in the middle of his term. The most important reason for him to compile this gazetteer was to clarify his reputation, so he included many articles written by him – of course these articles favored his administration. He was too poor to come back to his hometown after completing the gazetteer, and later died in Pingnan. See *Guangxu Wujin-Yanghu xianzhi* 光緒武進陽湖縣志, 22/40b.

Gutian, people here did not know what ‘government’ was, and were not much different from ‘raw barbarians.’ The condition of their primitiveness and wildness was difficult to be described by words.”² In order to emphasize his efforts to turn Pingnan into a civilized county, Shen Zhong might have exaggerated how bad things were in Pingnan in 1736. However, his words to some degree express the view on Pingnan locals during the early eighteenth century from an experienced official.

Pingnan was the untamed northern part of Gutian County before it was separated from Gutian. Until the completion of its first gazetteer by Shen Zhong in 1741, there was almost no official record about this region, except for some brief paragraphs about its notorious bandits and rebels. Most local documents I found in Pingnan were produced after the early eighteenth century. However, it does not mean that people there before “being civilized by their magistrate” were truly illiterate barbarians and did not use written texts. On the contrary, although Pingnan, or northern Gutian before 1736, seemed to be far away from the political institutions, a few textual materials suggest that written texts were not absent in northern Gutian. Textual practices might not be as prevalent as that of the last two hundred years of the imperial era, but certain groups of people did use written texts to communicate.

In light of this historical background, the first part of this dissertation investigates the use of texts on this margin of empire from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, roughly from the Southern Song dynasty to the end of the Ming. However, before diving into the world of texts, it is necessary to briefly survey the history of the people living in this place:

² Shen Zhong, “Zhi Ping guanjian 治屏管見,” *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 0/1-4.

Who were they? Were they all “barbarians” or honest subjects of the empire? What kinds of problems did they have to face?

From Tang to Song: Becoming Civilized and Governed

The early history of north Gutian is framed by two stories of “enlightenment:” a local leader who joined the civilized regime and a local official who transformed uncivilized locals.

According to the official records, Gutian County was incorporated into the Tang empire in 740 A.D. The earlier records about the incorporation of Gutian were brief and dry, but an article written by the legendary county magistrate, Li Kan 李堪, in 1005 disclosed a dramatic version about converted tribesmen.³ According to this article, a local leader, Liu Jiang 劉疆, surrendered his more than one thousand people and his lands to the supervisor-in-chief of Fuzhou in 740, in order to “submit to the mandate of heaven and turn his people toward enlightenment.”⁴ In the next year, the emperor established Gutian County upon the lands he donated and appointed Liu Jiang to administrate this region. Since then, Gutian became the territory of the empire, and Liu Jiang and his followers became the subjects of the empire.

³ The earliest record of this story is found in Li Kan’s “Gutian xian ji 古田縣記.” Li Kan was a legendary county magistrate of Gutian. He claimed this story was quoted from *Minzhong ji* 閩中記, an early Fujian gazetteer believed to be written in 851 but now lost. The earliest complete record of Li Kan’s “Gutian xian ji” is found in the *Wanli Gazetteer of Gutian County*, prefaced in 1600. However, part of Li Kan’s version of the story was also told in the earliest extant local gazetteer of Fuzhou, *Chunxi Sanshan zhi* 淳熙三山志, which was prefaced in 1182. Although the author of *Sanshan zhi* did not disclose his source, he cited Li Kan’s article. See *Wanli Gutian xianzhi* 萬曆古田縣志, 12/8-14; *Chunxi Sanshan zhi*, (Fuzhou: Haifeng, 2000), 22, 244.

⁴ Li, “Gutian xian ji,” 12/8a.

Who were Liu Jiang and his followers? In Li Kan's narration and some earlier versions of this story, Liu Jiang and his companions were described as "*xidong bumin* 溪峒逋民," fugitives in valleys and caves, or, "*donghao* 峒/洞豪," leader of the cave dwellers. The term "*xidong*" usually indicates the flat grounds or valleys among mountains where barbarians resided in southern China; this term implies that Liu Jiang had an uncivilized character. In his article, Li Kan provided an explanation for Liu Jiang's given name, "*jiang*", which has the meaning of "territory," by insisting that this name came from his cultivation of this place and made it a "territory" of the empire. While the authenticity of this kind of "origin" story is always questionable, this explanation made Liu's identity more allegorical.⁵ However, the main reason why Li Kan wrote down this story, instead of proving historical facts, was to recognize the loyalty of local leaders. Although Li Kan is known for destroying "evil shrines and temples" and propagating Confucius' teachings, he kept Liu Jiang's shrine intact. During the Song dynasty, Liu Jiang's temple was repeatedly given state titles, and in the 1250s, he was eventually promoted from a local deity to City God of the Gutian county seat.⁶ The story of Liu Jiang represents the root of the Gutian people's obedience to the empire and has to be repeatedly retold.

The image of Liu Jiang and his companions changed somewhat in later narrations. In the stone inscriptions written by local elites to celebrate the establishment of the Temple of City God in 1250s and its renovation in 1300s, two local gentries with a high degree via civil examinations underscored Liu Jiang's loyalty to the empire and his contribution to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Wanli Gutian xianzhi, 7/5. For the Song policy of entitling local deities, see Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

civilizing Gutian. According to the 1250s inscription, in appreciation for Liu Jiang's compliance, the emperor assigned him to administrate Gutian, but after a short term, he voluntarily retired and relinquished control to bureaucrats sent by the empire. In the later inscription, the author ascribed success in civil examinations in Gutian to Liu Jiang, who had enriched the county and encouraged local people to study.⁷ Furthermore, the words to describe Liu Jiang also changed. In the later narrations by local literati, Liu Jiang was called a "*tuhao* 土豪," the local tyrant/leader, or "*daxing* 大姓," the great surnames. With these epithets the ethnic/cultural implications were erased. They are more reflective of later social mores according to which local leaders and great surnames dominated the local society. Once considered an uncivilized chief in the words of a local official, in the thirteenth century local literati described him as a gentleman who selflessly devoted himself to the welfare of local community. The new image of Liu Jiang was merely the projection of local leaders during this period.

Liu Jiang's story was frequently repeated in local gazetteers and other articles about Gutian history because it provided a peaceful version of political integration, while such stories were usually violent. The widespread legend of Chen Yuanguang 陳元光 pacifying rebellious barbarians in southern Fujian during the Tang dynasty, and a serial stories of Yang Wenguang's 楊文廣 combating with the barbarian chiefs (later turning into a novel, *The Pacification of Eighteen Barbarian Caves* (*Ping man shiba dong* 平蠻十八洞)), are two other founding stories that dramatized the political incorporation of Fujian

⁷ Yu Falin 余發林, "Chenghuang miao ji 城隍廟記," *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 12/15b-16a; Zhang Yining 張以寧, "Gutian xian zengguang chenghuang miao ji 古田縣增廣城隍廟記," *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 12/25a/26b. Also see *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 7/5.

local communities into the state administration, but with a much more violent – and perhaps more realistic – plot.⁸ In southern Fujian, Chen Yuanguang, the barbarian-eliminating general sent by the state,⁹ was recognized as a deity and regarded as an ancestor by some local families. In Gutian, the local hero who donated his people and lands to the empire was also enshrined as the City God. Instead of being “pacified” by the state army and forced to submit to imperial ruling, the story suggests that the Gutian people voluntarily joined the empire without resistance. Their ancestors, as well as their descendants, were seeking the enlightenment of civilization, loyal to the empire, and enthusiastic about taking civil examinations.

Both Li Kan’s article and the stone inscriptions written by literati were included in the gazetteer preface in 1600. Each text inherited Liu Jiang’s story from previous ones, but modified the details to fit contemporary needs: declaring the prominence of official administration or presenting local achievements to join the national elites. The accuracy of Liu Jiang’s story was not the most important concern. Through the process of textual transmission, the image of Liu Jiang was remade over and over. This process of incessantly producing new texts to remodel the story of origin was performed by officials and local literati for the regional identity of a particular administrative unit; the example of Liu Jiang

⁸ For an ethnological analysis of Yang Wenguang’s story and this novel, see Li Yiyuan 李亦園, “Zhanghui xiaoshuo Pingmin shiba dong de mingzuxue yanjiu 章回小說平閩十八洞的民族學研究,” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan mingzuxue yanjiusuo jikan* 76 (1993): 1-20. For other cases in southeastern China, see Wing-hoi Chan, “Ethnic Labels in a Mountainous Region: The Case of She ‘Bandits’,” in *Empire at the Margins: Cultural, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 255-284.

⁹ For stories about dispelling barbarians and the construction of family history, see Huang Xiangchun 黃向春, “‘She/Han’ bianjie de liudong yu lishi jiyi de chonggou: yi dongnan difang wenxian zhong de ‘man-liao-she’ xushi weili ‘畬/漢’邊界的流動與歷史記憶的重構：以東南地方文獻中的‘蠻獠畬’敘事為例,” *Xueshu yuekan* 6 (2009): 138-145.

described here greatly resembles similar manipulations found in smaller but more intimate communities – i.e., the individual lineages.

Parallel to the deification of Liu Jiang, the county magistrate Li Kan also earned a particular position in the local narratives of “becoming civilized.” In the gazetteer compiled in 1600, Li Kan, the county magistrate of Gutian at the very beginning of the eleventh century, was recognized as the official who brought Gutian into the governance of the state. A long essay allegedly written by him was included in the gazetteer as one of the earliest descriptions of Gutian history. This article described his efforts to turn Gutian into a civilized place, including expelling “evil local beliefs,” establishing Confucian academies, and erecting an official *she* 社 altar. It was also in Li Kan’s essay that a written version of Liu Jiang’s conversion first appeared. As an official, in contrast to Liu Jiang’s status as a native leader, Li Kan was regarded as a key person in civilizing Gutian. In addition to becoming the symbol of a civilized Gutian, Li Kan also became a legendary figure who was enshrined and eventually entitled as a local deity as well.¹⁰

Both the stories of Liu Jiang and Li Kan are a part of the narratives of the “civilizing process” in Gutian. While Liu Jiang represented the local efforts to join the civilized regime, Li Kan was the official agent to transform these people on the margins of the empire. The formation of these stories represents the transformation of Gutian during this

¹⁰ Ironically, records from the sixteenth century mention that Li Kan was an official famous for dispelling Buddhism and other local beliefs; in spite of this, he was initially worshipped in a Buddhist temple before he was entitled by the state and given his own temple. According to this later story, he liked to visit a temple in Gutian and said he would like to become the deity of this mountain after he died. The transformation of Li Kan’s image is another interesting topic that I do not have the space to discuss in this dissertation. See *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 7/6b-7.

period. In the long history of colonization of southeastern China,¹¹ the relationships between “mountain people” and the state usually depended on how much the empire extended its power into the peripheral regions. Although this region was nominally placed under imperial administration in the mid-eighth century at the prime of the Tang, it was only after the Song dynasty put an end to the dominance of the long-standing warlords during the later eighth century and established a centralized regime that close contact between the local people and the government was regularized. While the identity of the people in Gutian was suspicious, stories were invented to justify their past and legitimize their present. Local literati in southern Gutian certainly participated in this process: they wrote the stone inscriptions and established the shrine. However, the people in northern Gutian, the area that would later become Pingnan County, did not necessarily share the stories of “enlightenment.” These “mountain people,” who might not be able to read what was written in the gazetteer, were still called “raw barbarians” in the early eighteenth century.

From Song to Yuan: Local Society in Northern Gutian

It was during the Song Dynasty that, because of the administrative need of the empire and growing market, the status of Gutian within the empire started to rise. Importantly, the southern part of Gutian was situated on the Min River, which connected Fuzhou City with transportation networks across the empire. Two post stations were established by the government along the Min River in Gutian County, and even the county seat was once

¹¹ Hans Bielenstein, “The Chinese Colonization of Fukien until the End of T’ang,” in Søren Egerod and Else Glahn, eds., *Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Dedicata* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959).

moved to one of them during the early Song while the regional order was undergoing reconstruction.¹² The establishment of post stations brought frequent official and commercial activities to southern Gutian and also the establishment of several new official bureaus, including more schools, shrines, and academies. Local families started producing a continuing flow of metropolitan graduates (*jinsshi* 進士) from the mid-eleventh century, and several scholars were famous for being Zhu Xi's disciples.¹³ The spread and transformation of Liu Jiang's story that he donated his own people and lands to the imperial administration and later initiated the civilizing projects in Gutian was concurrent with the transformation of Gutian from a newly incorporated territory to a proud hometown of scholars and officials.

While Gutian was politically and culturally integrated with the central state, local society in Gutian during this period was basically controlled by several leading families, or "great surnames" (*daxing* 大姓). Claiming to be descendants of early pioneers, these families owned a large amount of land, inherited from their ancestors and accumulated over several generations. These lands were either cultivated by family members or worked on by later immigrants as tenant farmers. The leading families were also those who could afford to educate their children, some of whom became metropolitan graduates; this is evident in surnames from the list of metropolitan graduates that had a dominant presence in

¹² *Zhengde Fuzhou fuzhi* 正德福州府志, 235.

¹³ For the list of the Metropolitan Graduates during the Song, see *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 9/1b-11b. For Zhu Xi's disciples in Gutian, see *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 10/1b-2b. The connection with Zhu Xi and Neo-Confucianism in Gutian was a topic that the sixteenth-century gazetteer tried to emphasize.

local gazetteers. Literati from these leading families were also those who wrote the articles to venerate Liu Jiang as a local hero when his shrine was renovated.¹⁴

On the other hand, although Li Kan claimed to destroy most “evil beliefs,” including Buddhism, in the early eleventh century, religious institutions continued to play an important role in both social and economic life. From the ninth to the early fourteenth century, Buddhism in Fujian was particularly powerful; Fujian was even called “the country of Buddha.”¹⁵ Buddhist monasteries were built throughout Gutian County, even deep in the mountains, and possessed many estates. In a twelfth-century record, only 0.39% of households in Gutian were registered as “households of monks,” but 17.2% of the fields and 31.9% of the mountains were registered as temple lands.¹⁶ Many Buddhist monasteries obtained their estates from wealthy local donors. From the High Tang to the Song dynasty, the emperor granted high ranking officials permission to build temples, usually called “temples of merit” (*gongde si* 功德寺). These were situated near ancestral graves by special dispensation, so that Buddhist monks could constantly pray for their ancestors. However, from the Song dynasty, many wealthy persons who did not have imperial permission started to build their own temples of merit to take care of graves and perform rituals; in some cases, they donated an existing temple for placing the spirit tablets

¹⁴ A member of the prominent Yu 余 family wrote the stone inscription for the establishment of the City God Temple in the 1250s, and Zhang Yining 張以寧, a famous scholar from a family of bureaucrats wrote the one for the renovation of this temple during 1300.

¹⁵ See the survey by Chikusa Masaaki 竺沙雅章, “Fukken no jiin to shakai 福建の寺院と社會,” in *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中國佛教社會史研究 (Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1982), 145-198.

¹⁶ Huang Minzhi 黃敏枝, “Songdai Fujian lu de fojiao siyuan yu shehui jingji de guanxi 宋代福建路的佛教寺院與社會經濟的關係” in *Songdai fojiao shehui jingji shi lunji* 宋代佛教社會經濟史論集 (Taipei: Xueshang, 1989), 122-123.

of their parents or ancestors.¹⁷ Together with the policy of the Song dynasty to entitle local deities, religious institutions, including Buddhist monasteries and temples of local deities, became fields for local families to donate their wealth and extend their influence. In the case of Gutian, the Lady of Linshui 臨水夫人, was the most influential local deity. Granted a title by the government in the early thirteenth century, a stone inscription narrating the renovation of her temple in 1348 shows the enthusiastic donation of local families of officials. Similar to Buddhist temple practices, the leader of this renovation was also enshrined in the Temple of Lady Linshui.¹⁸

Meanwhile, as Gutian became increasingly integrated into the state, the cleavage between northern and southern Gutian enlarged. Besides the county seat, where officials, clerks and the gentry gathered, the post stations on the Min River in southern Gutian grew into bustling commercial towns that attracted merchants, transporters, and other professionals. Furthermore, southern Gutian, situated in the middle reach of the Min and its branches, also had relatively more plains and better transportation; in contrast, northern Fujian occupied the smaller upper branches of the Min and Huotong Rivers, which was much more mountainous and had smaller plains in its valleys. During the Song-Yuan period, while the leading families in southern Gutian accumulated their lands, participated in trade and local politics, and sent their promising young men to school and to take civil examinations, the relatively fragmented population of northern Gutian was fighting for

¹⁷ Chikusa Masaaki, “Sōdai funji kō 宋代墳寺考,” in *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū*, 111-144; Huang Minzhi, “Songdai de gongde fensi 宋代的功德墳寺,” in *Songdai fojiao jingji shi lunji*, 241-300.

¹⁸ Zhang Yining 張以寧, “Linshui shunyi miao ji 臨水順懿廟記,” *Cuiping ji* 翠屏集, 4:48b-50a. For an interpretation of this inscription and the early development of the belief in Lady Linshui, see Li Ren-Yuan, “Cong Mingdai shiliao kan Linshui furen xinyang de zaoqi fazhang 從明代史料看臨水夫人信仰的早期發展,” in *The First Conference on the Culture of Lady Linshui, Gutian: Fujian*, 2010.

limited resources both among themselves and with new immigrants from other regions. These differences are apparent from various perspectives during the Song-Yuan period and after, including how official records described the residents in these two regions and in the amount of surviving written materials.

During the Song-Yuan period, the primary forces in the local society of northern Gutian were Buddhist monasteries and local families. The administration of local government in northern Gutian was relatively weak and inconsistent. If a local official attempted to increase the control over this area, what he had to face were major Buddhist monasteries with numerous estates and local families, who mostly migrated here from the late Tang to the Song. The strategies of Li Kan were the model for local officials: he confiscated the estates of monasteries, and educated local people with Confucian canons. However, most of the time, the most important affairs here were the confrontation among migrants who competed for land and other natural resources in these mountains and forests.

The first chapter of Part I is an attempt to reconstruct the use of texts in northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period. In contrast to southern Gutian, where one can find collected poems and essays written by local literati, there is almost no surviving text in northern Gutian. However, it does not mean that people in northern Gutian did not use written texts in villages. Some materials discovered later provide several clues to infer the textual practices in this region, their interactions with local communities, and general social trends. From the observations I make from these materials, I suggest how we might study texts from a local perspective during the 10th-14th centuries.

Ming Dynasty: the State and the Society

During the Ming dynasty, the situation, especially the local power structures, was somewhat different from previous dynasties. The state policy of the Ming on local administration was one of the most important factors. From the very beginning of its regime, the Ming government initiated a series of policies that enhanced the documentation systems of local administration. Among them, the most important one was the Yellow Register system (*huangce* 黃冊), which was designed as a mechanism to update the information of household registration every ten years and operated within the hierarchical administrative framework. Household registrations and other documentary records became the basis of local administration. Although most of these bureaucratic efforts did not last long or soon became corrupted, they popularized the use of written documents at the lower level of society, and influenced people's perception of written texts and the making of non-official documents. Thus, the second chapter concentrates on the efforts of documentary administration by the Ming state and its consequences.

Throughout the Ming dynasty, the people in northern Gutian could be roughly divided into four main categories. The first includes those who had lived in northern Gutian before the Ming and were registered as commoner households at the beginning of the Ming. These people might or might not be registered in the previous dynasties, but in this new regime, they attained a registered household in the official registration system, and had to be taxed, provide labor services for local government and fulfill many duties and obligations.

The second one was those who also lived in northern Gutian before the Ming, but were registered as military households. According to various estimates and local

genealogies, the rate of registered military households in Fujian or in Pingnan was high.¹⁹ Once being registered as military households, there would be many military obligations to be fulfilled, including providing a male adult to the army and preparing travel expenses for him. However, many families later successfully escaped from these obligations or even got rid of their registered military households.

The third one was those soldiers and their relatives who were sent to Pingnan to cultivate military fields (*juntun* 軍屯). Many lands in Pingnan were allocated to military fields by the Ming government. A large part of them came from the estates of Buddhist monasteries, which were oppressed by the government and attacked by bandits during the dynastic transitions, and the estates abandoned by fleeing local families during the chaos. These hereditary soldiers came from other counties or even other provinces, and were sent here by military administrations to cultivate the fields and support the garrisons around the provincial capital, Fuzhou, and the northeastern coast of Fujian. As soldiers from military households, these outsiders were regulated by many rules and documents, such as not being allowed to sell their allocated fields. From the mid- to the late Ming, a part of them escaped from their assigned locations, and many of them eventually settled down in northern Gutian and became a part of the local society.

The fourth category consisted of those who migrated to northern Gutian during the Ming. Although northern Gutian was deep in the mountains and not on the main

¹⁹ There were several ways to conscript adult males during the Ming dynasty. See Yu Zhijia 于志嘉 (Yue Chih-chia), *Mingdai junhu shixi zhidu* 明代軍戶世襲制度 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng xuju, 1987), 1-45, and Yu Zhijia, “Zailun duoji yu chouji 再論垛集與抽籍”, *Zheng Qinren jiaoshou qizhi shouqing luwenji* 鄭欽仁教授七秩壽慶論文集 (Taipei: Daoxiang, 2006), 197-237. For a detailed discussion on the conscriptions in Fujian during the Hongwu reign, see Yu, “Zailun duoji yu chouji,” 199-203. For the number of military households in Fujian, see He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, *Minshu* 閩書, 39:958; Yu, *Mingdai junhu shixi zhidu*, 10-26.

transportation routes, under the pressure of increasing population more and more people moved to northern Gutian from the coast or other mountain valleys throughout the Ming period. In addition to the population pressure that pushed people to look for new arable land along the upper valleys, many were encouraged by the flourishing market economy and came for the natural resources in mountains and forests: timber, iron and silver. Several iron furnaces and paper mills were built in northern Gutian, but the most influential one was silver mining, which attracted numerous migrant miners from other counties.

These immigrants came here without local registered households, and were not controlled by either their home government or the government in Gutian. To local people, these strangers, especially the silver miners, did not produce their own food, did high-risk jobs and competed for the limited natural resources with them. Conflicts between new immigrants and those who had settled down for a while were inevitable. To local officials, unregistered immigrants were a threat to local order. To extract the resources and contend against local people, these immigrants needed to organize themselves, and these unregulated organizations, in the eyes of officials, made them gangs, bandits, or even rebels.

The local history in northern Gutian throughout the Ming was by and large the interactions among these four groups of people: early immigrants registered in commoner households, early immigrants registered in military households, outside soldiers of military fields and unregistered new immigrants. Under the imperial framework, each developed their own strategies to survive from the harsh competition in such a mountainous area and to improve their living conditions. On the one hand, they tried to get rid of the restrictions or obligations imposed by the state; on the other hand, they also borrowed official power to

compete with other groups of people. Each group had its own special problems and all the groups were put into the same stage, facing similar challenges.

Many of these activities involved the manipulation of written texts. Although few textual materials in northern Gutian from this period have survived, in the third chapter, I use a special case to show how texts were used in this particular historical context. The case came from a family who was registered as a military household in the early Ming, but they escaped from the heavy duties, organized silver mining, and became a wealthy family in northern Gutian. After a series of conflicts with the official power and among inner members, they eventually moved to the county seat, and joined the social network of local elites. This case shows the rise of a minor family from the texts they created.

The main theme of the three chapters in the part one is to explore the early textual practices in these marginal communities. Although under most circumstances the textual practices during this period were limited to a relatively smaller group of powerful families, these texts not only shaped contemporary political and social relationships, but also influenced later generations during the Qing, including how they remembered their predecessors, and how they identify themselves now.

Chapter 1

The Early Tradition of Texts in Northern Gutian: Documents and Society during the Song-Yuan Period

People are generally obsessed with the question of “origins,” such as the lasting debates on the invention of paper or printing. If there is a textual culture in northern Gutian, or more generally, Chinese villages, when did it begin? This question is difficult to answer, especially when northern Gutian was a marginal region receiving little attention from official records. The earliest extant texts I found from northern Gutian/Pingnan were made in the early seventeenth century, but that does not mean that people in this region did not produce textual materials prior to that. On the contrary, some retrospective sources suggest the use of texts in this region from the Song to the Ming dynasties.

The aim of this chapter is not to write a comprehensive history of textual production in Song-Yuan northeastern Fujian. Instead, this chapter is based on the close reading of later materials about the use of texts and social constructions during the Song-Yuan period. By dissecting this particular case, I reconsider the previous elite model and demonstrate another model of textual production in local society. Historians of Ming-Qing local society might be familiar with how a local textual tradition was constructed. However, this chapter attempts to extend this tradition to an earlier period, and explores the possibility to find historical traces from the retrospectively constructed texts produced much later. Although this kind of texts is not historically precise and usually taken as “fabrication,” the

ways they constructed and presented their textual evidence still disclose the literate mentality and their perception of texts and history. The alternative model of textual production that this opening chapter demonstrates is the basic approach to understanding local texts throughout the whole dissertation.

Building a Lineage in Northern Gutian: Official Version

Although few written materials of northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period have survived, a relatively rich document is preserved and indicates the process of lineage building and textual formation of a surname group in this region. This document is included in the *Genealogy of the Gantang Zhangs* 甘棠張氏, which was compiled in 1846 by a government student in Gantang village.¹ This genealogy preserved the copies of three untitled prefaces of “previous” genealogies, but only the last one can be convincingly described as being geographically related to the people in northern Gutian – although not necessarily related to the people in contemporary Gantang village. The compiler copied the first two from somewhere else to make their genealogy “older” and more authoritative.

In order to enhance the credibility of the early history, when a genealogy was compiled, the genealogist usually tried hard to include the earliest textual materials. Sometimes the genealogist copied the earlier texts from other genealogists with the same surname, even though the genealogical connection was not proven. Sometimes the earlier texts were fabricated much later but taken as evidence of genealogical continuity.

¹ The Gantang Zhangs village hired a professional genealogist to compile their new genealogy in 2001. A large part of the content in this new genealogy came from the 1846 one. I found a copy of this 1846 genealogy in the Gutian genealogist’s workshop.

Fabricated texts, genuine old texts and new textual materials were often edited all together after recurrently revisions, and it becomes a challenge for researchers to differentiate the date of each text.² In these three prefaces, judging by their narrations and the place names they mentioned, the two older ones were obviously copied from genealogies outside this region. Only the third one was locally based, but since its narration ends at the Yuan dynasty, there is no evidence that the Gantang Zhangs were their descendants.

This preface allegedly belonged to a genealogy compiled by two individuals who identified themselves as members of the twelfth generation of the fifth branch of the Zhangs in northern Gutian in 1325. The genealogy was approved by the descendants of the first branch with the signatures of their members while being completed, and the members of the first branch continued to revise it twice in 1338 and 1362.³ Although in the 1846 genealogy it was placed as a “preface,” it is actually a very detailed narration of the history of the Zhangs for more than three centuries. As many genealogies attempt to trace their ancestors back as early as possible, this 1325 genealogy attempted to trace their ancestors to the Yellow Emperor. However, what makes this genealogy significant is that it also tried to provide a full story of their efforts and struggles after moving to northern Gutian.

According to this preface, their ancestor, who was given the honorable title of “*kaituo gong* 開拓公,” or “the Venerable Pioneer,” by their descendants, moved from the Fuzhou area to northern Gutian during the mid-tenth century, and finally settled in Zheyang 浙洋, a little basin along a branch of the upper Gutian River 古田溪, which is a minor branch of the Min River. The Pioneer carved out mountains and forests, married

² For a case in Fuzhou, see Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 29-36.

³ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu* 甘棠張氏家譜, 52-53.

three wives, and had nine sons. He and his first wife died in the late tenth century and were buried in the mountains near Zheyang; his two other wives, whose dates of birth and death were unknown, were buried in the mountains around Wenyang 溫洋, about twenty-one kilometers away from their Zheyang settlement.

Three years after the Pioneer's death in 995, six of his nine sons divided and inherited his estates, while one of the sons became a Buddhist monk and two were still young. This document emphasized that this division was licensed and recorded by the local government. In 1004, after the two younger sons had grown up, they again divided the estates into eight and reported the division to the local government. Some estates around Wenyang were undivided and taken as the fund of ancestral worship. Afterwards, the eight sons lived on the separate estates they each managed, and each kept their own registered deeds with the official seals. Soon after, in one unknown year, the descents of the eight sons transferred the previously undivided estates to Wenyang and built a temple there.

When the sons divided the Pioneer's estates in 995, they did not divide the estates around the Pioneer's grave, but claimed to note in the deeds that each branch had to contribute to the ancestral worship. In 1024, the branches agreed to hold the annual ritual of worship in rotation, and each branch had to host the ritual in turn. However, some of them "forgot their origin" and "discarded the registers [of rotation]," so the ritual was interrupted for a while. In 1061, several members attempted to revive the ritual, and created a board (*paiban* 牌板) registering the names of each of the branches. As one branch finished their duty of hosting the ritual, they were to transfer the board to the next branch according to the order listed on the plate. However, as time passed, this method did not go well, and the annual ritual was interrupted again.

During the Qiandao 乾道 reign (1165–1173) of the Southern Song, the forests near their ancestors' graves in Zheyang were frequently invaded by neighboring people outside their lineage. The branch in Zheyang gathered members from other branches and registered a complaint with the local government. In 1172, this group decided to revive the ritual of ancestral worship by writing out the new registers for the sacrificial rituals. This time they made the practices more rigid. Every branch had to sign the registers. They decided on the date for the ritual, and clarified the principle of dividing the sacrificial meats and other offerings among the members who participated in this ritual. Each branch was required to watch the forests and mountains in their duty year, and any branch failing to fulfill its duty for the ritual had to pay a penalty, which would be used to reward any lineage member who caught thieves stealing from their forests.

Because the branches lived far away from each other and could not police the mountains well, their forests were still invaded by encroachers. Out of frustration, in 1224, the first branch of Zheyang and the sixth branch of Xiling 熙嶺 again gathered lineage members to file a lawsuit. This group also collected money from each member to build walls and the remaining money was added to the fund to reward those who caught thieves. Soon after, they used the interest from this collected fund to buy additional common fields for supporting the ritual of ancestral worship. The designated host of the ritual collected rents from these fields, partly paid the taxes to the government, and partly provided for the needs of the ritual; with this system, the hosting branches would not have to be concerned about the expense of the annual ritual of ancestral worship at the gravesites. They also had an agreement that every year all the branches had to perform the ritual at the Pioneer's grave, but in years assigned to the sixth branch of Xiling and the eighth branch of Wenyang,

who were the descents of the other two wives buried in Wenyang, all the branches had to perform the ritual at the graves in Wenyang as well.

After setting the sacrificial fields, the Zhangs started to build the shrine for the rituals. In 1261, led by the first and the second branches in Zheyang, the Zhangs enhanced the grave of the Pioneer, and in 1269, the second branch initiated the building of the shrine in Longshang 龍山; this made it possible for the lineage members to gather together during the ritual. During the early years of the Yuan dynasty, while the Mongol army conquered this region in 1276, all the neighboring houses were ransacked and burned, but their shrine remained intact. In 1278, this shrine was burned as a consequence of conflict among lineage members. The Zhangs tried to rebuild the shrine in 1283, but it was once again burned by bandits from a neighboring province. In 1300, the sixth branch of Xiling, together with the first and the second branches, led the plan for its reconstruction and decided to move the shrine to a new location on the other side of Longshan. After the shrine was completed in 1309, they decided to use the rents from the newly purchased fields to support this shrine.

The formal genealogy of the Zhangs in northern Gutian was written after the establishment of the shrine. In 1325, several members in the fifth branch compiled a genealogy for all branches. This genealogy recorded the names of ancestors, the descent lines of each branch, the descendants who could participate in the ritual of ancestral worship, the number of sacrificial fields, and various written agreements among lineage members. The compilation of this genealogy was initiated by the first branch, and revised twice in 1338 and 1362 respectively by the members of the first and the sixth branches. It was through this genealogy that the history of the Zhang family immigration and

development was recorded and made known to their descendants as well as to researchers several centuries later.⁴

Three Wives, Eight Sons and a Monk

If we follow the narration of this document compiled in the fourteenth century, the story of the Zhangs seems to be a very typical case of lineage building. The descendants of a common origin arrange the ritual of ancestral worship, build a shrine, and eventually compile a general genealogy – a perfect textbook. However, if we look deeper and consider the local context, the story is not as cut-and-dried. By retrospectively constructing and articulating the narration, the compiler arranged these details with a purpose.

If we locate all the place names on maps (Map 3), it is easy to tell that the eight branches of the so-called Pioneer's descendants clustered around two or three communities – the branches around Zheyang basin and the branches in Wenyang and Xiling – and each of these groups had its own inherited estates around their residence. During the process of lineage building, it is apparent that these groups led the communal activities in different periods. Their connection was built by the claim that the branches in Xiling and Wenyang were the descendants of the Pioneer's two younger wives. However, very little about the two wives was disclosed. While the dates of birth and death of the Pioneer and his first wife were precisely recorded, those of the two wives are unknown. This absence is quite exceptional, since the dates of birth and death were important to ancestral worship and were often recorded on the tablets or ritual texts.

⁴ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 30-53. There are no page numbers in this document. I follow my own pagination.

Moreover, it is also very unconventional that the graves of the two younger wives would be so far away and were almost isolated from their original residence. Further, it was only after a negotiation in 1172 (one hundred and seventy-seven years after the death of the Pioneer) that the rituals of ancestral worship for the Pioneer's two younger wives were incorporated into their communal rituals. All signs suggest that, instead of sharing a common ancestor in the late tenth century, the connection between these three communities in different parts of northern Gutian – or at least this perfect order of eight sons from three wives – might have been constructed in a later period.

This is not to say that the kinship connections among these eight branches were completely made up, but during the process of lineage building, connections could sometimes be symbolically constructed. For example, allegedly the Pioneer had nine sons but there were only eight branches, because his fourth son became a Buddhist monk. In a more detailed description, this son later established a Buddhist temple, and the Zhangs donated many estates to support this temple. Therefore, this fourth son and his father, the Pioneer, became *tanyue* (檀越, a Buddhist term for “donor,” transliterated from Sanskrit, *dana-pati*) of the temple. Because this father and son swore to be worshipped together before they died, a shrine for them was built besides the main hall of the temple. On his father's birthday, a Buddhist ceremony would be annually performed. At the beginning, six branches of his descendants, excluding the branches in Xiling and Wenyang, had to participate, but because the residences of some branches were too far away from the temple, they decided that only the first branch of Zheyang had to attend this ritual; according to the

genealogy, this agreement was written in a document kept by the descendants of the first branch.⁵

If we compare this story with other genealogies dealing with similar issues, the story of the fourth son appears to be consistent with a popular practice among the wealthy during the Tang and the Song dynasty. From the mid-Tang dynasty, the emperor would grant royal members or high officials a temple to perform the ritual of worship toward their ancestors. Beginning in the Song dynasty, out of fear that their ancestors might not be properly worshipped, the wealthy started to place the spirit tablets of their ancestors into temples. They either built their own temple without the emperor's permission, or donated estates to a temple to make it serve their family. Their ancestors, usually in the name of *tanyue*, were enshrined in a side hall of the temple, and the monks guaranteed that the ritual would be properly performed so that the descendants would be blessed by the ancestors. Because of its Buddhist background, this practice was sometimes condemned by Neo-Confucian scholars during the Song dynasty, who insisted on the Confucian way for the worship of ancestors.⁶

Before the decline of local Buddhism from the Ming dynasty onward, many powerful families still placed the spirit tablets of ancestors in temples they had built and to which they had donated a large amount of land; however, the story in written records was usually elaborated in some other way. In many cases, it was attributed to an important ancestor who favored Buddhism. While migrating or simply while traveling or touring, this ancestor

⁵ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 75-76.

⁶ See Chikusa, "Sōdai funji kō," and Huang, "Songdai de gongde fensi." Several cases in other part of Fujian, see Chang Jianhua 常建華, "Fujian Xinghua fu de zongzu cimiao jizu 福建興化府的宗族祠廟祭祖," *Mingdai zongzu yanjiu* 明代宗族研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai remin, 2005), 97-101.

had chanced upon a good place to build a temple, so he built the temple while alive and was enshrined in it after death.⁷ In some other cases, it was one of the founding father's sons who became a Buddhist monk. Because this son did not have descendants, he was worshipped in the temple. The case of the Zhangs describing a fourth son who became a monk and swore to be worshipped together with his father in the temple their family donated is a mixture of the two. Making a son a Buddhist monk explains why their founding ancestor was worshipped in a Buddhist temple.

This kind of story in genealogies not only explains the ritual of worship that was currently held in the temple, but also supports the dominance of a family over a temple and their historical ownership of the temple estates. Because this connection was supported by written materials, a particular family would have support for participating in temple affairs, especially in the affairs dealing with the temple estates. In most conditions, the temple was not necessarily built by the founding ancestor or his son – it would have been unusual for the first-generation immigrants to have had sufficient wealth to build a temple – more typically, the descendants several generations later would have built it for their ancestors, and retrospectively traced it to their founding ancestors. Sometimes the family donated

⁷ There were many cases of this kind, for example, Badi *Lan-shi zupu* 巴地藍氏族譜, 3. Another story from northeastern Fujian in a Zhang genealogy is quite vivid. Their ancestor, an official of the Tang dynasty, escaped from the late Tang chaos in the early tenth century. He found a good place to settle in the northeastern Fujian mountains, but after living there for three years, a mysterious old man with a white beard told him that this place was good for a Buddhist temple but not for the family. The old man suggested a better place for the prosperity of his descendants and then disappeared. Several days later, two priests visited him at home, and he decided to donate all his land for a temple, *Zifu yuan* 資福院, (“the Temple of Accumulating Blessings”) to these two priests, and moved to the place that the old man had suggested. Later on, he built a shrine for his high-official ancestors in the new place and was later buried beside it—practically making this temple his family temple. See *Gantang Zhang-shi yiapu*, 5-7. The name of this shrine, *Zifu yuan*, was commonly used for family temples for ancestral worship during the Tang-Song period.

estates to an existing temple and converted it to their own family temple, but in written materials they would claim to be the *tanyue* or the founder of it.

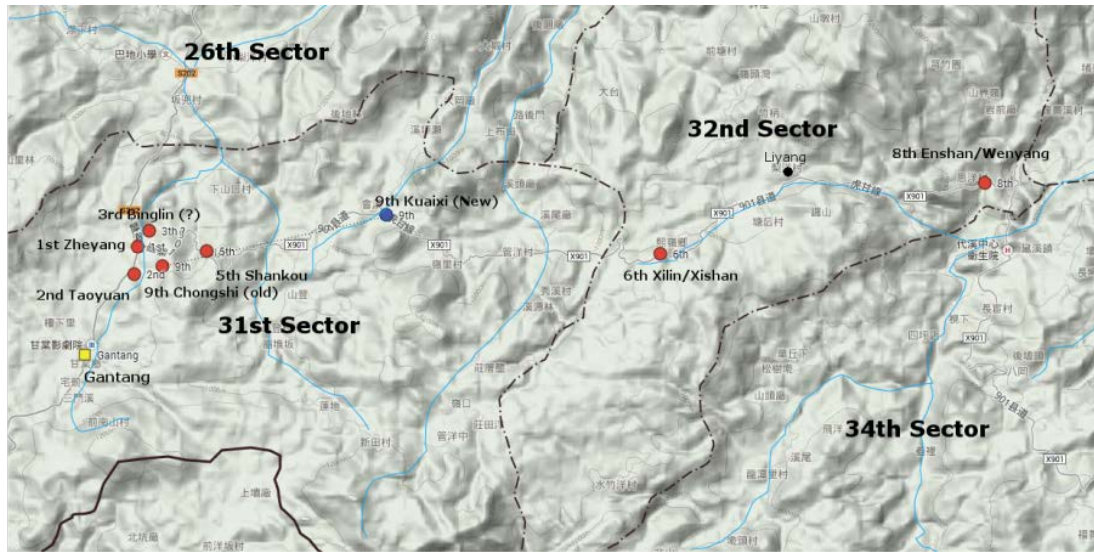
As mentioned earlier, Buddhism had a strong presence in Fujian during the Song-Yuan period, and in Gutian a twelfth-century record attests that almost one-fifteenth of the fields and one-third of mountains were registered under Buddhist temples. This was still true after Li Kan's destructive attacks against local religions and Buddhism in the early eleventh century. According to Li Kan, when he became the county magistrate of Gutian, the number of temples in the area was "greater than the stars in the sky." These temples and shrines were supported by leading local families and participated in their factional conflicts. Li Kan destroyed forty-nine Buddhist temples and three hundred and fifteen shrines, and forced three hundred and twenty-eight monks and more than four hundred shamans into commoners. Through this action, Li Kan transformed more than five thousands *mu* of land from the temple estates into official control, and used the materials and lands from these temples to build the county school.⁸

Li Kan's article not only points out the bountiful estates that the temples held, but also the close relationship between the temples and local leading families. In addition to support for the ritual of ancestral worship, one of the prominent reasons that local families donated estates to temples was to avoid certain taxes and corvée service. Temples were also willing to forge connections with local powers for protection from various attacks initiated by local governments, other leading families, or bandits.⁹ While the connection was important to both sides, it was quite natural to require written texts testifying to the relationship between

⁸ Li, "Gutian xian ji," 12/10b-11a.

⁹ Huang, "Songdai de gongde fensi," 254-260.

temples and local families that was built upon the enshrinement of ancestors and donations of estates.¹⁰ This proof became an integral part of family histories recorded in genealogies. In the case of the Zhangs, having a story in the genealogies about an ancestral son who was a Buddhist monk was a way to prove the family's control over the temple and temple estates.¹¹ Constructed or not, this one son, even though he failed to establish one of the eight branches, played an important role in their family history.



Map 4 Eight Branches of Zhang Family in Northern Gutian¹²

¹⁰ In many cases, records were on stone inscriptions established in the temple. See the inscriptions in Putian quoted in Chang Jianhua, "Fujian Xinghua fu de zongzu cimiao jizu."

¹¹ The Zhang's family temple, *Nanquan si* 南泉寺, was still recorded in the 1600 gazetteer, but the temple estates no longer belonged to the Zhangs. See *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 14/11a.

¹² *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 75-79.

Chart 2 Eight branches of Zhang family in Northern Gutian

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1st | Zheyang |
| 2nd | Taoyuan 桃源 |
| 3rd | Lingbing 嶺柄 ¹³ |
| 4th | Buddhist Monk in Nanquan 南泉 Monastery |
| 5th | Shangsi 杉溪 (Shankou 杉口) |
| 6th | Xishan 熙山 (Xiling 熙嶺) |
| 7th | Unknown |
| 8th | Enshan 恩山 (Wenyang 溫洋) |
| 9th | Chongshi 重石, then move to Kuaixi (會溪) |
| Grave of the Pioneer and other ancestral graves at mountains near the water-end of Zheyang | |
| Monastery of the 4 th son (location unknown) | |
| Grave of the second and third wife in two different locations near Wenyang and another monastery moved from Liyang to Wenyang to watch the graves | |

Natural Resource, Government and Local Alliance

It is clear from the narration that the late-twelfth-century lawsuit related to the maintenance of the estates around Zheyang, which were claimed to have been inherited from their ancestor, the Pioneer, provided a catalyst for the branches of the family to organize themselves. Although previously there were some unsuccessful attempts to organize the annual ritual of ancestral worship in 1024 and 1061, the unification of all branches stemming from the branch of Zheyang was clearly stated in 1172. Compared to

¹³ The current location of Lingbing is known but is described as “at the water-end of Zheyang.”

the relatively ambiguous description of previous ritual arrangements, clearer information of their communal rituals was provided, including the date, the practice of dividing sacrifices, and the funding. In the next lawsuit in 1224, clearly the branches of Zheyang and of Xiling had come together to lead the rest of the lineage members.

Securing “the estates around the Pioneer’s grave” apparently was a reason for the Zhangs to organize themselves by arranging common rituals, constructing common buildings, and making written agreements beginning in the late twelfth century. The attempt in 1172 was in response to disputes over the forests on the estates around Zheyang, a similar reason that inspired the next arrangement in 1224. During the former, they stabilized the annual performance of rituals at graves where the dispute was based, and set up the duty to watch the forests, and with the latter, they established the corporate properties of sacrificial fields with the funds they used to defend the estates.

Disputes over the ownership of the forests and mountains continued from the Song, and became a frequent topic in legal cases.¹⁴ In northern Gutian, with its mountainous landscape and peripheral status, these disputes were more prevalent and ferocious. While the boundaries of plains and fields are relatively easy to mark, the boundaries of mountains and forests are more elusive. Moreover, forests provided rich resources for people residing in the mountain area: not only for timber, but also for firewood, which was the main source of energy for daily use and industrial production, such as iron-smelting and refining materials from the mines. With the growing economic activities in mountain areas, immigrants competed for the mountain resources; for example, silver and iron mining

¹⁴ Several legal cases about disputes over properties in mountains or around ancestral graves in the Southern Song were recorded, and many of them happened in northern Fujian. See *Minggong shupan qingming ji* 名公書判清明集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987), 157-163, 197-198, 324-325, 585.

started in Gutian no later than the early eleventh century, and papermaking from wood pulp and bamboo was also an important industry in several locations of Gutian.¹⁵ Under a flourishing economic development in southern China during the Song period, increasing numbers of immigrants made these mountains very competitive regions, and legal cases over land and natural resources greatly increased in southeastern China.¹⁶

Dealing with these disputes over lands, forests, or other natural resources, one of the effective ways to prove one's legitimate ownership was to provide certain written documents. In this kind of dispute over properties with unclear ownership, few could provide an official document of registration or transaction. The opening by their ancestor might not have been approved by the government at the beginning, and it was usually only when official intervention was requested that these properties "had to" be registered. For most of these cases with no direct documents sanctioned by the government, an alternative method was to prove one's historical ownership and legal inheritance. This was why the Zhang genealogy emphasized that the Pioneer opened these lands and mountains about two hundred years earlier, and the descendants legally divided and inherited these estates. When describing this decisive family division in 995, it was noticed that these were the estates that their ancestor "reported to the government and asked for the permission to open up" (*chenqing kaituo* 陳請開拓), and this division had been "reported to the county

¹⁵ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 5/34a-37b.

¹⁶ During the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Jiangxi had a reputation for numerous lawsuits. Aoki Atsushi's 青木敦 study attributes this phenomenon to immigration and competition for natural resources. See Aoki Atsushi, "Kenshō no chiiki-teki imēji: jūichi - jūsan seiki kōsei shakai no hō bunka to jinkō idō o megutte 健訟の地域的 イメージ: 十一～十三世紀江西社會の法文化と人口移動をめぐって," *Shakai keizaishigaku* 社会経済史学 65.3 (1999): 3-22. Fujian's social and economic situation was similar to that of Jiangxi during this period.

government” (*jingxian chenzhuang* 經縣陳狀) at that time.¹⁷ It seemed unlikely that an owner could provide legal documents for each estate issued more than two hundred years ago; presenting evidence from their own family records would be much easier. In other words, these explicit declarations, instead of being neutral statements from the past, were intended to support current ownership claims.¹⁸

Emphasis on the location of ancestral graves was another way to prove historical ownership. Many legal cases concerning disputes over estate ownership were over the estates of ancestral graves.¹⁹ While it could be said that it was easy to have disputes over the limits of estates surrounding ancestral graves, at the same time, the location of ancestral graves was often used as evidence of historical ownership. The burial of an ancestor in a specific location was the most direct evidence available to certify that a group’s ancestors had opened up a particular region. Descendants had the right to inherit the estates around these graves. In addition to the fact that ancestral graves were the location that the communal rituals of ancestral worship were held, the detailed records of ancestors’ graves provided a statement of legitimate ownership of certain estates.

According to the description in the genealogy, the scale of the estate of ancestral graves near Zheyang was quite huge and had a flat landscape, heavy forests, and excellent *fengshui*.²⁰ To claim their priority over the resources on this estate against encroachments

¹⁷ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 41

¹⁸ However, while genealogical records could be used as effective evidence in legal cases, later local officials were reminded to be cautious for the faked documents inside genealogies. See Fang Dashi 方大澍, *Pingping yan* 平平言 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997), 3.

¹⁹ In the famous collection of Southern Song legal cases, *Minggong shupan qingming ji*, there is a section for disputes over graves. See *Minggong shupan qingming ji*, 322-329.

²⁰ See *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 40.

by other nearby residents, the Zheyang Zhangs presented textual and physical evidence in support of their request for intervention by the local government. At the same time, they also reorganized their communal rituals of ancestral worship, which were held in front of these graves. It is not certain whether the Zheyang Zhangs had had a close relationship with the Wenyang Zhangs and the Xiling Zhangs or not; none of them were mentioned in these documents before this conflict. Judging from the repeated failures to organize the ritual, there was no stable and strong connection among all these Zhangs in different locations, or, at the very least, maintaining a connection among these disperse families was very difficult and required stronger motives. However, during the reorganization of 1172, apparently a close alliance was built among these branches. It seemed to be beneficial for the Zheyang Zhangs to integrate these Zhang branches into their alliance. The Zhangs of Wenyang and Xiling seemed to be powerful in their own locations, since they had had a temple to watch over their estates in Wenyang and Xiling.²¹ For the Zheyang Zhangs, a stronger alliance would help them to win the lawsuit and secure this estate in this competition. For the Zhangs of Wenyang and Xiling, they would gain shares in the properties in Zheyang, which was quite bountiful. It was a good deal for both sides.

The alliance was forged by arranging a more organized annual ritual of ancestral worship that required every branch to attend. The ritual of ancestral worship definitely

²¹ The fourteenth-century genealogy did not provide the date of establishment of the temple in Wenyang, but noted that it was established for watching over the graves and forests in Wenyang, Xiling and Zheyang. Because Zheyang was in quite a distance from these two places, I am inclined to speculate that the Zhangs of Wenyang, and probably also of Xiling, had their own temples; it is likely that the Zheyang Zhangs also had their own, which could be the one they claimed to have built for the fourth son of the Pioneer. This inference is supported by the fact that in the temple built for the Pioneer's fourth son, only six branches of the eight had to participate in its annual ritual on the Pioneer's birthdays, and the branches in Xiling and Wenyang were excluded. The fact that they might have had two identical temples and separate rituals supports my argument that the Zheyang Zhangs and the Zhangs of Wenyang and Xiling might not have been close before the 1172 dispute.

could be traced to Confucian classics, but actual practices were far more complicated: the Confucian elements were usually added much later. This 1172 arrangement marked the first time that the Confucian principle of dividing the sacrificial meat equally among each of the participants was clearly spelled out. By sharing the meat sacrificed to the common ancestors, annual participation in the ritual, to some extent, confirmed membership in this lineage alliance. Moreover, the participants were not only members of this alliance descended from the same ancestor, the Pioneer, but also had shares in the properties inherited from him. To stabilize the ritual's performance, a register of sacrificial ritual was created and signed by the representative of each branch.²²

The formation of this lineage alliance was effective. Although they could not stop neighbors from logging in their forests and had to file another lawsuit about fifty years later, the fact that the filing of the next lawsuit in 1224 was led by both branches of Zheyang and of Xiling showed these two somewhat distant communities had been self-identified to the government as a single group. Also it was clearly stated that these two branches gathered their “lineage members” (*zongzu* 宗族); this is the first time that this specific term was used in the narration. The common properties for the rituals were established in the name of better utilizing the interests from the fund collected from each lineage member to guard the estates of the Pioneer.

Furthermore, a more subtle arrangement was made to allow for the worship of the graves of the “two wives,” the alleged ancestors of the branches of Xiling and Wenyang, by all the Zhangs in turn whenever these two branches held the ritual. It was a negotiation that since the ancestor of the Zheyang had been worshipped by all, the ancestors of Wenyang

²² *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 44.

and Xiling, who might have had their own organized annual ritual of worship, might also require to be reciprocally worshipped by other Zhangs. This arrangement was therefore a further integration of these Zhang communities in the valleys of northern Gutian. It also disclosed that the initial structure of “eight sons from three wives” could be confirmed no earlier than the early thirteenth century, when the principle of reciprocal worship was established. While this kind of alliance usually repositioned the relationships of the branches as the descendants of brothers from the same father, in the case of the Zhangs in northern Gutian, they were descendants of different wives of a common ancestor.

After several sacrificial fields were purchased to support the rituals and communal activities, the problem related to the estates around the Pioneer’s grave seemed to have been solved or was no longer important. While the communal rituals symbolically united these branches, these corporate properties became the material basis for further consolidating this group. After the integration initiated for securing the properties in Zheyang from the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century, the Zhangs of northern Gutian became a relatively solid lineage group, even though conflicts among branches still existed. Given a stronger material and ritual basis, from the mid-thirteenth century, there were several attempts to build an ancestral shrine for all the Zhang members in northern Gutian. The shrine constructed under the leadership of the branches in Zheyang in 1269 was destroyed due to internal conflicts. After that, the branch of Xiling led a successful construction in 1300, but changed the location of the original shrine, probably because of the previous internal conflicts. The building of ancestral shrines during this period was part of a trend associated with the declining use of Buddhist temples as sites for ancestral worship, and the introduction of ancestral shrines for families of non-officials. However,

one of the main purposes of the shrines was still maintenance of the graves and spirit tablets of the ancestors; laymen, instead of Buddhist monks, were hired to do this job. Compared to the ancestral shrines during the Ming-Qing period, which were usually built in the center of the communities as a common space for lineage affairs, the ancestral shrines built by the Zhangs during this period were located nearby the ancestral graves to provide a place to perform ancestral rituals.²³

Textualizing the Past

From the early fourteenth century, some members of the Zhangs started to compile a genealogy for all branches. The first formal genealogy was compiled by a branch in Zheyang in 1325, but was revised in 1338 and in 1362 mainly by the branch in Xiling, which seemed to be quite powerful since the fourteenth century. The genealogy surely did not emerge from nothing. According to the preface, the compilers collected the registers of sacrificial rituals, the registers of sacrificial fields, and various family records from each branch as references. From these written documents, they “traced the origins, studied the details, and gathered the veritable records” (推源溯流，熟講精究，採其實錄) to compose this general genealogy for all.²⁴ The expression from tracing the origins to gathering the trustful records suggests that apparently one of the main tasks for these compilers was to solve the contradictory descriptions in these texts and create a coherent narrative. It was expected that documents developed in different branches over such a long period would produce many contradictions, and to reach a coherent narrative would require negotiations.

²³ For this transformation, see Chang Jianhua’s study on Huizhou. Chang Jianhua, “Song-Yuan shiqi Huizhou jizu de xingshi jiqi bianhua 宋元時期徽州祭祖的形式及其變化,” *Huixue* 徽學 (2000): 38-51.

²⁴ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 50.

Although there was no further evidence, the fact that the first two revisions of this genealogy came by relatively short intervals and by different branches suggests a process of reconciliation. It also suggests that during this period in the fourteenth century, genealogy compiling was a central activity of lineage building, and therefore the members in different branches had such a strong interest in revising the genealogy.

What we know about the early history of the Zhangs in northern Gutian comes from this written genealogy compiled in the early fourteenth century. From this preface we know there were written materials organizing this descent group or recording its past. The significance of this composition in the fourteenth century was the first successful attempt to compile a communal text in the format of a written genealogy on the basis of previous documents and oral histories. The written documents that this genealogy was based upon were produced for settling various problems within or around the descent groups, such as rotation orders for hosting the communal rituals or the list of corporate estates and group management. The genealogy organized these diverse statements into a coherent story unfolding chronologically.

The coherent statement surely corresponded to the compilers' current needs. It is very possible that the whole story of the Pioneer and his nine sons was put into texts for the first time during this composition, including the Pioneer's three wives, their birth order, the residences of the eight sons corresponding to eight communities, and the one son without descendants. It does not mean that the whole story was invented in 1325. The structure of this story and its details could have been transmitted for a while through several media. For example, the Pioneer's name and dates of birth and death might have been recorded on his tomb or other ritual texts kept by the branch of Zheyang, and the story of brotherhood

fostered among them might have emerged around the lawsuit in 1172. However, the written genealogy provided a consistent version that could be precisely copied, distributed to a wider audience, and transmitted to next generations. In this sense, the story of the Pioneer and his sons not only helped consolidate the descent groups and secure the common estates, but also stabilized the current structure of lineage organization.

In addition to the story of the Pioneer, this genealogy further traced the origin of their ancestors before the Pioneer to the ancient period. The genealogy began with the fifth son of the Yellow Emperor, and was followed by a series of historical figures such as Zhang Yi 張儀 (died in 309 B.C.) during the Warring States Period and Zhang Liang 張良 (died in 185 B.C.) in the early Han Dynasty. Like many Fujian genealogies, a claim that their ancestors were immigrants from the central plain connects the family to the empire. This genealogy also traces their ancestors to an official from Gushi 固始 in Henan 河南, who moved to Fujian in the late ninth century, during the chaos of the late Tang dynasty.²⁵ When living in Fuzhou, this official, Zhang Mu 張睦, served under the Kingdom of Min, established by Wang Shenzhi 王審知, a warlord from Gushi, and rose to a very high position. Afterwards, his sons and grandsons migrated to different locations and became the ancestors of the Zhangs in northeastern Fujian.²⁶

While this model of a migrated high ranking official and his multiple sons who settled in different locations as the ancestors of the people with the same surname in a region was

²⁵ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 32-33.

²⁶ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 36-37. As for Gushi as the origin of the people in Fujian, see the discussion in Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 54-55 and Hugh Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong : Chinese University Press, 2007), 47-66.

a frequent theme,²⁷ when and how this specific story came about is difficult to determine. Zhang Mu's story probably was adopted in northern Gutian when compiling the genealogy in the early fourteenth century, but it has been in circulation for a while in different genealogies and other written records. The story might have come from the lower Min River region, since the destinations of migration mentioned in the story were all in this area, specifically situated in Houguan 侯官 and Yongtai 永泰 Counties. While Houguan was where the city of Fuzhou was located, Yongtai, a county on a branch of lower Min River, was probably the origin of this story before it came to Gutian. The migration story told in this fourteenth-century genealogy was obviously an early one, because in other versions of Zhang Mu's story recorded in later genealogies during the Ming-Qing period, the migration destinations of the Zhangs' descendants were greatly increased and wide-spread. It is difficult to know when the Zhangs in northern Gutian started to identify themselves as descendants of a capable official from the central plain; however, it is obvious that the Zhangs decided to make this story their official history of origin and include it in their records when they compiled their first genealogy in this period.

Reconsidering Elite Model

A popular model to understand the role of texts and their dissemination is to take them as the vehicle by which the elite class transmitted orthodox values and transformed the "mass." This elite-transmission model is even more popular when discussing the

²⁷ In addition to "the men of Gushi," another well-discussed case is the story of Zhuji xiang in the Pearl River Delta, see David Faure, "Lineage as Cultural Invention: The Case of the Pearl River Delta," *Modern China* 15.1 (1989.01): 8-14.

genealogies during the Song-Yuan period. For example, in his book on Fujian genealogies, Chen Zhiping, a prominent scholar of Chinese social history, concludes that the boom in genealogy compiling, as well as lineage building, in Fujian during the Song dynasty was fueled by “officials, literati and Neo-Confucian philosophers.” With the spread of Neo-Confucianism in Fujian, “[Fujian scholars and officials’] opinions and actions, without a doubt, directly engendered the development of Fujian lineage institutions and the popularization of genealogy compiling.”²⁸

For scholars of Chinese history the decisive phase for the development of genealogy and also for the development of lineage organization began during the Song dynasty and continued in the Yuan dynasty.²⁹ In the 1940s, a pioneering scholar, Makino Tatsumi 牧野巽, argued that “early-modern” lineage organizations in China were initiated in the Song, developed during the Yuan and Ming and fully matured in the Qing.³⁰ Makino listed several features which started to develop among descent groups during the Song-Yuan period and continued to play important roles in lineage organizations in late imperial

²⁸ Chen Zhiping 陳支平, *Fujian zupu* 福建族譜 (Fuzhou: Fujian remin, 1996), 6-10.

²⁹ While the study of lineage organizations during the Ming-Qing period is still active in the West, in recent years, a number of studies of lineage organizations in the earlier periods in Western languages are relatively few. The most comprehensive review of the early development of lineage organization in Chinese history is still Ebrey’s article written almost thirty years ago. See Patricia Ebrey, “Early Stages of Descent Group Organization,” in Patricia Ebrey and James Lee Watson, eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 16-61. An exception is Hugh Clark’s recent book on lineage organization in southern Fujian. See Hugh Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song*. However, lineage organizations and their role continue to be central topics in Song-Yuan studies in Chinese and Japanese languages. See Endo Takatoshi’s review in a recent set of collected essays: Endo Takatoshi 遠藤隆俊, “Sōron: Sō-gen no bu 総論-宋元の部,” *Sō -Min sōzoku no kenkyū* 宋-明宗族の研究 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2005).

³⁰ See Makino Tatsumi, *Kinsei Chūgoku sōzoku kenkyū* 近世中國宗族研究 (Tōkyō: Nikko Shoin, 1949), especially the first chapter.

China.³¹ Among these features, ancestral halls for performing family rituals, sacrificial fields or other forms of corporate estates, and genealogies that required regular revision have gained the most attention from scholars, and have been acknowledged as the three essential elements of lineages that could be traced back to the Song-Yuan.³² Although not all scholars accepted Makino's "early-modern" scheme, many later studies implicitly followed this periodization and his "sociological" approach,³³ and took the early development during the Song-Yuan periods as the foundation of "lineage society" in late imperial China. How these new features were applied to shape the early lineage organizations became the focus of the study of Chinese society during the Song-Yuan period.

To understand this crucial change and these new "features," some scholars have offered different explanations depending on their understanding of the general framework of Chinese history. A popular approach is to consider them as a part of the great transformation from the Tang to the Song dynasty, or more specifically, as a part of the transformation of social elites and the way they sustained their prestigious status. In an effort to secure their prestigious status in the face of the pressures of social mobility

³¹ Compared to the so-called "ancient principles," Makino Tatsumi listed six new features of lineage organizations during the Song-Yuan period: 1. Leaders of lineages were not always the eldest descendants and could be selected according to wealth or status; 2. The ancestors worshipped in the sacrificial ritual extended to those more than four generations before, so that descendants from ancestors more than four generations could be integrated as a unit; 3. Establishment of ancestral shrines and corporate properties; 4. Compilation of genealogies and family rules; 5. Autonomous organizations of self-regulation and self-defense; 6. Lineage institutions spontaneously developed from family members rather than by the direction of official powers. Makino Tatusmi, *Kinsei Chūgoku sōzoku kenkyū*, 5-9.

³² These three "elements" are often taken together to describe the character of lineage organization in late imperial China, for example: Endo Takatoshi, "Sōron: Sō-gen no bu," 13; Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," 51.

³³ Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅, "Sōzoku wo miru shohō 宗族を見る手法," in *Sō -Min sōzoku no kenkyū*, 95.

resulting from the changing political and economic structures, social elites tended to invest more in local affairs and advance their leading positions in the local community using this so-called “localist strategy.”³⁴ These elites eventually achieved a hegemonic status in political, economic, and cultural spheres, and dominated the order of local society. In local society they carried out activities such as constructing regional marriage networks or building temples and shrines; a particularly prominent activity involved organizing local kinsmen into a sustainable group assuring that their status and power could be transmitted to future generations.

Several efforts, including the ideological revival of ancient principles of lineage, could be understood in this context. Fan Zhongyan’s 范仲淹(989–1052) “charitable estate” was the most explicable example. His charitable estate as obviously influenced by Buddhism was established to nourish local kinsmen and support their weddings and funerals.³⁵ Shimizu Morimitsu argues that it is an early example of corporate lineage estates that we frequently see in Ming-Qing lineage organizations.³⁶ Efforts by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修(1007-1072) and Su Xun 蘇洵(1009-1066) to compile genealogies were even more widely recognized as the standard procedure of lineage building. Later genealogists usually claim that their composition strictly followed the formats designed by them. So-called Su-style (*su-shi* 蘇式) and Ou-style (*ou-shi* 歐式) became common terms that

³⁴ Robert Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: the Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁵ Denis Twitchett, “The Fan Clan’s Charitable Estate, 1050-1760,” in *Confucianism in Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 97-134.

³⁶ Shimizu Morimitsu 清水盛光, *Chūgoku zokusan seido kō* 中國族產制度攷(Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1949)

needed no explanation, even though the principles they set up were not strictly followed within a century of the writing of the genealogies.³⁷ It is believed that their efforts of genealogy compilation were taken to consolidate the lineage organization by clarifying its boundaries.³⁸

These explanations imply that efforts during the Song-Yuan period, including genealogy compiling, were initiated by social elites, who were mostly educated bureaucrats and officials, and supported by Neo-Confucian scholars, to organize their kinsmen and perpetuate their prestigious status.³⁹ Following this “elite model” which takes lineage building as a movement led by the upper classes, it is very natural to assume a top-to-bottom process when the regional dissemination of lineage organizations is at stake. This model often goes with the assumption that genealogies were initiated by elites who brought them to the lower class. As Taga Akigorō 多賀秋五郎 argues in his ambitious catalogue of Chinese genealogies in the 1960s: “After the chaos throughout the

³⁷ Ebrey, “Early Stages of Descent Group Organization,” 44.

³⁸ Ebrey, “Early Stages of Descent Group Organization,” 37; Kobayashi Yoshihiro 小林義廣, “Ōyō shū ni okeru zokufu hensan no igi. 歐陽修における族譜編纂の意義,” *Nagoya daigaku tōyōshi kenkyū hōkoku* 6(1980): 189-216.

³⁹ This raises two questions concerning the relationships between ideologies and actions that I have no space to discuss in this chapter. First, were these lineage building efforts influenced by Neo-Confucian scholars’ philosophical discussion about the principles of *zong* 宗, or were discussions by scholars such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 and Zhang Zai 張載 meant to support and justify current trends of lineage transformation? Second, was the motive of these efforts endorsed by philosophers merely to secure their own interests, or did they have a higher goal of restoring order in the world? For previous discussions, see James L. Watson, “Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research,” *The China Quarterly* 92 (December 1982): 589-622 and following comments, also see Ebrey, “Early Stages of Descent Group Organization,” 39-40. Similar reflections can also be found in Japanese studies of Song-Yuan lineages. While most scholars influenced by Makino and other previous historians tend to accept unconditionally that these philosophical discussions reflect contemporary problems, some remind interested researchers that the intellectual contexts of Neo-Confucianism and the philosophical concerns of scholars should not be neglected. See Endo Tōakahashi, “Sōron: Sō-Gen no bu,” 15-16 and Sasaki Megumi 佐々木愛, “Sōdai ni okeru sōhōrōn wo megutte 宋代における宗法論をめぐって,” *Sō-Min sōzoku no kenkyū*.

late Tang and the Five Dynasties, a new social order was established, and the stratum of *shidaifu* 士大夫, as the dominant class, was formed. At this moment, instead of the genealogies managed by the state, a new kind of genealogy to promote their own lineages appeared. During the Yuan-Ming-Qing period, this kind of early-modern genealogy penetrated down to the common people and became popular.”⁴⁰ Inheriting Makino’s idea of “early-modern” lineages, Taga Akigorō goes one step further to contribute the rise of lineage organizations, as well as genealogies, to a particular elite group. This assumption is especially popular when dealing with newly incorporated regions, such as Fujian during the Song dynasty.

To some extent, this elite model contains potential bias, which makes its interpretation formalized and unbalanced. The bias from this model is partly created by the fact that few textual materials directly related to lineage building during the Song-Yuan period have survived, and most of our knowledge about early lineage organizations is drawn from the texts written by high ranking officials or scholars from their literary collections, such as essays discussing the principles of lineages or a few prefaces to genealogies. Studies of these high-end materials tend to magnify the role of elites or the role of certain texts. Morita Kenji 森田憲司 is one of the scholars who realizes the limit of the elitist interpretation of Song-Yuan genealogies. Based on his survey of prefaces to genealogies from literary collections during the Song-Yuan period, Morita observed a sudden boom in prefaces to genealogies distinguishing the Song period from the Yuan: he found only nineteen during the longer Song period, but one hundred and eighty-six during

⁴⁰ Taga Akigorō, “Sōfu no seiritsu to seichō ni tsuite kenkyū 宗譜の成立と成長について研究,” *Chūgoku sōfu no kenkyū* 中國宗譜の研究 (Tōkyō: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, 1981-1982), 117.

the Yuan.⁴¹ However, Morita does not associate this change with a sudden increase of genealogy compiling or with the great changes in lineage organization, during the Yuan dynasty. Aware of the nature of literary collections, Morita argued that the meaning of genealogies as literary texts among the literati circle was evolving. In addition to a growing interest in requesting “prefaces” from famous literati for various occasions, it became common to ask an outstanding contemporary to write a preface for one’s genealogy. Together with the appearance of printed genealogies, genealogy compilation, instead of a private activity within a limited group, gained publicity from its production and circulation.⁴² Morita’s study shows that the higher visibility of genealogy prefaces in literary collections did not necessarily result from a general boom in the production of genealogies or a fundamental change in lineage organization; rather, the higher visibility was indicative of changing attitudes among literati toward the writing of genealogy prefaces. The increase of genealogy prefaces has to be examined in light of the literary scene among social elites, and needs to be thought about together with other kinds of “prefaces” and preface-writing practices prevailing during this period. Instead of a general transformation of lineages, the significance of this phenomenon should be more related to the literati community, the ways they built the social network, and the meaning of pedigree among the literati circle. Although Morita’s explanation for this change during the Yuan

⁴¹ A more comprehensive counting was done by Taga Akigorō, who collected nine prefaces of genealogies during the Northern Song, forty-three during the Southern Song, and one hundred and ninety-eight during the Yuan. See Taga, *Chūgoku sōfu no kenkyū*, 134, 143-145, 148, 155-161.

⁴² Morita Kenji 森田憲司, “Sō-gen jida ni okeru shūfu 宋元時代にこける修譜,” *Tōyōshi ken'yū* 37(1979): 509-35.

dynasty is not very convincing,⁴³ his study implicitly underscores the importance of considering the context of textual production and circulation, and the limits of literary texts and the elitist model.

Western scholars, whose studies of Chinese lineages or Chinese social history benefited from work by Japanese precursors in the early stage, also have made a similar note. In her important article on the early stages of lineage development, Patricia Ebrey notes the cleavage between elite leaders and uneducated members in descent group formation:

Historical sources largely present educated men as the catalysts of descent group or lineage organization. Acting on the basis of their own interests, values, or needs, educated men could certainly have tried to establish kinship groups. But for these groups to thrive and endure, they must also have served the needs of kinsmen who did not belong to the educated class. Sometimes it was undoubtedly the latter who formed the organization that educated men later tried to develop further.⁴⁴

She later proposes that “special attention to cases where educated men seem to have been responding to the needs of local agnates, rather than imposing on them their own ideas.”⁴⁵

In these passages, Ebrey points out that individuals in different social and cultural positions within a lineage organization might have held different views toward their community, and that the current historical sources mostly only disclose those of the elites. In a further step,

⁴³ Morita argues that this changing attitude toward the writing of genealogy prefaces and lineages was a reaction to the chaos during the dynastic transition and the insecurity of Confucian literati and elite class under the Mongol rule. Morita, “Sō-gen jida ni okeru shūfu,” 43-45. Ming-Qing scholars tend to start with the early Ming and Song scholars concentrate on Neo-Confucian debates and the strategies of several grand families during the Southern Song; the significance of the development of lineage organizations during the Yuan dynasty has been seriously neglected. Some recent studies in Chinese and Japanese have started to explore this underestimated era. The most ambitious study is probably Nakajima Gakushō’s 中島樂章 discussion of the overall institutional changes and lineage formation during the Yuan period. See Nakajima Gakushō, “Genchō tōchi to sōzoku keisei 元朝統治と宗族形成” in *Sō-Min sōzoku no kenkyū*.

⁴⁴ Ebrey, “Early Stages of Descent Group Organization,” 17.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

she also implies that, although several concepts about lineages and “new features” might be developed or polished by the educated class, the variant forms of descent groups did not always follow the same elite model, and, on the contrary, the “educated men” might only just base what had been done and push it further. Because of the lack of materials, the non-elite members were often underrepresented. Therefore, in order to better understand lineages in the early stage, one should keep in mind that lineage building methods varied and also try to utilize different materials to access a wider body of evidence. However, in this possibly the most important collected essays on Chinese lineage organizations, almost all the articles in this collection, including most part of hers, pertain to mostly elite leaders and their interests.

Texts from Below

The case of the Zhangs in northern Gutian, however, demonstrates another model, which I name “texts from below.” None of the members in these eight branches became officials at least not before the compilation of this genealogy. According to later genealogies of the descendants of the Zhangs,⁴⁶ none had yet earned a degree – usually these were the achievements that a genealogy would not miss, or even try to fabricate. During the period they compiled the genealogy, Zhang Yining 張以寧 (1301–1370) was the most famous official-literati in Gutian. He became an academician in the Hanlin Academy and was one of the scholars who came to Nanjing to meet the new emperor after

⁴⁶ I found ten genealogies of the Zhangsin Gutian claiming to be the descendants of Zhang Mu from Gantang, Xiling, Enyang 恩洋, Shenyang 深洋, Shiyang 仕洋 and Jitou 潔頭.

the Ming dynasty was established. In Gutian, he was asked to write the inscriptions for the renovation of the temple of the Lady Linshui, and the temple of City God, Liu Jiang, the two most representative deities in Gutian, and was invited to write the prefaces of genealogies for three different families.⁴⁷ However, even having the same surname, the Zhangs in northern Gutian did not try to make connections with Zhang Yining's family, which was based in the county seat in southern Gutian, and did not ask for a preface from him, which was regarded as an important aspect of genealogy during the Yuan suggested by many scholars: to join the elite network.⁴⁸

The process of genealogical compilation and lineage formation from this case of northern Gutian shows that, instead of being directed by certain ideologies or principles, more elements were involved in the Zhangs' organizational efforts in two centuries. Competition for economic resources was a prime motivation for their organizing themselves. Both the natural environment and the historical trend of immigration created this competitive condition. Limited resources in southeastern China urged people to group together under different principles, and lineage was the prominent system in northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period.

However, a single economic motive cannot explain all their activities or their format of organization. Interaction with state power, which in this case was represented by the local government, drove them to adopt a form which could be recognized by the state. In order to request state intervention to claim their monopoly over certain economic resources,

⁴⁷ Zhang Yining, *Cuiping Ji* 翠屏集, 3/16a-20a.

⁴⁸ Hymes, "Marriage, Descent Groups, and the Localist Strategy in Sung and Yuan Fu-chou;" Morita, "Sō-gen jida ni okeru shūfu."

the form of lineages was required to initiate the legal action and legitimize their ownership. The possibility of calling for official intervention at this moment was imbedded in the extension of local governance during the Southern Song, and the further incorporation of the Gutian region into the Chinese state. This was best illustrated by Li Kan's story as a capable county magistrate who built up all the governmental infrastructures in the early eleventh century. Several studies show that during the Ming period, legal cases or disputes over corporate properties, such as graves, family temples, or ancestral shrines, served as a catalyst for descent groups to reorganize themselves into a solid entity in Huizhou.⁴⁹ This case of Gutian implies that, under similar conditions in the competitive natural environment in Huizhou and northeastern Fujian, similar developments might have happened since as early as the twelfth century while local descent groups interacted with their competitive neighbors and local governments.

The general social structure in local society also influenced the form of their lineage organization. Surname groups, interpreted as *daxing*, were the basic units in the politics of local affairs, and also the basis of lineage formation. In this mountainous landscape where territorial communities were relatively small and isolated, uniting the communities of the same surname in different locations in the name of common origins was the most effective way to make an alliance. Through the concept of lineage, this alliance was easily interpreted as a sibling relationship: the descendants of different sons of the same father. In this sense, a lineage organization was also a political alliance sharing common interest in

⁴⁹ A Feng 阿風, "Mingdai Huizhou zongzu mudi yu cimiao zhi susong tanxi 明代徽州宗族墓地與祠廟之訴訟探析," *Mingdai yanjiu* 17 (2011.12): 1-47; Nakajima Gakushō, *Mindai gōson no fūnsō to chitsujo: Kishū monjo o shiryō toshite* 明代郷村の紛争と秩序：徽州文書を史料として (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2002), especially chapter 5.

local communities. While brotherhood stories were widely used in mountainous areas to connect dispersed communities, it was textualized in this genealogy as the Pioneer and his eight sons.⁵⁰

In order to maintain the stability of the alliance of the same surname, an annual ritual was held to confirm their communal relationships. Although religious elements were usually downplayed in later written genealogies, it is obvious that Buddhism played an important role in the early ritual performances. Their founding ancestor was worshipped in a shrine inside a Buddhist temple, and a Buddhist ceremony was held annually on the founding ancestor's birthday. This ceremony, *minyang zhaihui* 冥陽齋會, purifying the souls of ancestors and blessing living descendants, had a long tradition that could be traced back to medieval China.⁵¹ The temple nearby the graves in Wenyang was also described in Buddhist terms as being built for accumulating merit for their ancestors during the ceremony on the ancestors' birthdays.⁵² Confucian elements came late. The Confucian "meat-dividing" practice was described in their ancestral worship at graves only after the first lawsuit in 1172, more than one hundred years later than the Buddhist ceremony. Even after the introduction of Confucian elements, the practice of Buddhist ceremony persisted. In other words, although the ritual of ancestral worship was widely discussed by Confucian scholars and sometimes taken as a Confucian practice, it was actually a mixture of different

⁵⁰ See Wang Mingke's thoughtful discussion on the "historicity" of this pattern from brotherhood stories among the Qiang people in the Sichuan mountains. Wang Mingke 王明珂, *Qiang zai Han-Zang zhijian: yige Huaxia bianyuan de lishi renleixue yanjiu* 羌在漢藏之間：一個華夏邊緣的歷史人類學研究 (Taipei: Lianjing, 2003), 211-250.

⁵¹ *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 76; Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

⁵² *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 41.

elements, and the Buddhist influence was very conspicuous at least in its early manifestation.⁵³

In this more-than-three-centuries narration of the Zhangs' lineage formation, development was marked by several events, and each event brought some organizational change. These changes mostly responded to then-current problems that this group of people needed to solve, such as the lawsuit over common estates in the Southern Song, or reconstruction after the dynastic transition and disturbances during the Yuan. Although this reversely constructed narration made these changes teleological – descents of common ancestors gradually built up a standard lineage organization with corporate properties, annual rituals, an ancestral shrine, and a written genealogy – it should be noted that the elaboration of this story took place after the organization was already relatively established. Several manipulations and conflicts – such as the construction of the eight-son story and conflicts that led to the destruction of the first ancestral shrine – were only slightly hinted at but not featured in the later more consistent narration. Since a genealogy is in itself a process of lineage formation, it is very difficult to avoid a teleological interpretation for a reverse construction of a genealogy. Instead of taking the whole as an intentional construction led by a certain ideology, a relatively cautious interpretation would be to take each event that took place in the past three hundred years and in different generations as an

⁵³ For a discussion in English on the Buddhist elements in ancestral worship during the Song dynasty, see Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," 23; Barend ter Haar, "Book Review: Portrait of a Community," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 38 (2008):289-292. However, most studies are written by Japanese scholars, especially Chikusa Masaaki. In addition to the works mentioned earlier, also see his summary of the Buddhist influence on funeral and ancestral worship during the Song in Chikusa Masaaki, "Sōdai bukkyō shakaishi ni tsuite 宋代佛教社會史について," in *Sō-gen bukkyō bunkashi kenkyū* 宋元佛教文化史研究 (Tōkyō : Kyūko Shoin, 2000) 452-457.

attempt to solve the problem in their own generation; later solutions could be constructed using the structure created by previous events.

However, from a broader perspective, we can still observe a trend: from the tenth to the fourteenth century, this descent group became more and more organized, or, in other words, the attempts to organize them became more intense. In the process of organization, written documents played a crucial role. Specific written materials, such as deeds of family estate divisions or registers of sacrificial rituals, were usually established in tandem with such important arrangements. The tangibility of these documents was highly emphasized in this brief narration of lineage history, and on many occasions, the branch that took the responsibility of keeping a specific document was also recorded. That is to say, this fourteenth-century genealogy was not only a coherent narration based on previous documents, but it was also a collective statement indicating the presence and the preservation of these documents. Because materials are limited, it is difficult to trace the production of each document; however, by stressing indications of their presence in records we can observe that documentation had been highly valued in northern Gutian no later than the early fourteenth century when this genealogy was compiled and these records of using documents were made and, indeed, possibly even earlier at the moment the documents described in the genealogy were produced. Clearly, the “literate mentality” of using written materials in organization had appeared in northern Gutian during this period.⁵⁴ The use of written materials by a group of people in northern Gutian to some

⁵⁴ The idea of “literate mentality” comes from Clanchy’s study on the use of documents in medieval England. See M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

extent came together with the literate mentality of the process of organization in local society.

Conclusion

The gap between the studies of Ming-Qing period and Song-Yuan period in Chinese history can be found in various fields, and is particularly obvious in the fields of Chinese societies and lineages. The studies during the Song-Yuan period extensively examine Confucian scholars' arguments on reviving the lineage principles as well as lineage practices, such as rites and genealogies, and their case studies tend to focus on the elite strata, especially on the marriage strategies of elite families. Although Ebrey has noted the variety of organized descent groups,⁵⁵ most cases take the Neo-Confucian paradigm as a standard, and the Song-Yuan lineages as the precursor of developed Ming-Qing lineages. This partly results from the rarity of early sources on local lineages, and also partly results from the dominance of the deeply rooted elitist model.

Meanwhile, in the past decades, studies of Ming-Qing lineages have benefited from inquiries about regional variants. Cases in different parts of southern and eastern China have enriched our understanding of lineage organizations at the local level. Examinations of the interactions among lineage organizations and different institutions – political, economic and religious – have broadened our imagination about how descent groups were organized. On the one hand, these studies are furthered by informative local documents surviving from the Ming-Qing period, especially numerous genealogies. On the other hand,

⁵⁵ Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," 56.

a further consideration of their textuality helps us understand the intentions and motives of the local people in organizing descent groups.

However, the studies of Ming-Qing lineages seldom trace back further to the earlier period of the Song and Yuan. While exploring the fictionality of early texts preserved in Ming-Qing genealogies gives us an idea of how the local people fabricated their common origins and constructed their lineage identity, the same fictionality to some degree hindered the attempt to study the heritages from the previous efforts of organization. Fabrications in genealogies were pointed out as early as the Song dynasty when genealogy writing enjoyed a revival, and such criticisms never ended.⁵⁶ Many Ming-Qing historians overstate the fictionality of these retrospectively constructed materials, and few seriously study the details of these stories, which mostly allegedly were written during the Tang and Song period. It is important to realize that people did not fabricate materials from nothing and for no reason; a cautious and close reading of early texts can still provide us with ideas about genealogy compilation and lineage formation.⁵⁷

The case presented in this chapter is based on a fourteenth-century text recorded in a nineteenth-century genealogy. Since finding an original piece of Song-Yuan genealogy is unusual, this copy provides a rare example for exploring the textual construction of

⁵⁶ For example, Zhou Mi 周密 even showed his suspicion on the authenticity of Ouyang Xiu's genealogy by counting the years of generations. See Zhou Mi, *Qidong yeyu* 齊東野語 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 191-192.

⁵⁷ Hugh Clark defends his use of early texts preserved in modern genealogies in his study of the lineage formation in Mulan Valley during the Song. However, his study is still criticized in this regard. The problem, as ter Haar points out, is probably that he tends to follow the rhetoric of early texts and to take it as historical evidence. In doing so he argues that the genealogical tradition among elites in Mulan Valley were as early as the ninth century, even earlier than the "revival" by Su Xun and Ouyang Xiu. See Hugh Clark, *Portrait of a Community*, Hugh Clark, "Reinventing the Genealogy: Innovation in Kinship Practice in the Tenth to Eleventh Century," *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 237-286, and Barend ter Haar, "Book Review: *Portrait of a Community*," 285-292.

lineages during the Song-Yuan period. Most of the Song-Yuan prefaces were very brief, and only ambiguously stated their family's noble origin and tradition.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, besides the fabricated ancestral origin, this Zhang preface in northern Gutian also provides detailed descriptions and precise statements of dates and place names that could be certified within their historical context. The authenticity of this preface is also supported by descriptive discrepancies that correspond with later texts; this shows that several descriptions in later genealogies were based on this document – or at least had the same origin – and that they kept this early one relatively intact.⁵⁹

This case illustrates how lineage organizations, as well as lineage texts, were gradually built up. Instead of being consistently led by a group of educated elites or a systematic Confucian ideology, the genealogies compiled during the Yuan dynasty were based on several lineage documents in the past three hundred years. These documents were made to respond to concrete problems within different historical contexts, to compete for natural resources, to file a lawsuit and introduce official inventions, or to make an alliance

⁵⁸ For example, the Song preface in the genealogy of the Jixia Gans only told a very simple story of their ancestors during the Shang dynasty on a single page. This story from more than three thousand years ago can hardly be used as historical evidence. The Song preface in the genealogy of the Ruiyuan Yaos told a relatively convincing story of family dividing, but unfortunately mentioned “Fujian province,” which did not appear before the Ming dynasty. See *Bohai-jun Gan-shi zupu* 渤海郡甘氏族譜, 6; *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu* 瑞雲姚氏族譜, 9.

⁵⁹ There are many cases that genealogists changed early texts, or fabricated an early text, to support their later composition. During this process of reverse construction, genealogists usually changed the details to keep the consistency among different versions. However, several discrepancies in the case of the Zhangs show that earlier materials were kept in this copy. Among several examples, the most obvious one is the name of the fourth son who became a monk. In the fourteenth-century preface, it was clearly stated that he had a two-character secular name, his alter name was lost in the records, and his Buddhist name was never mentioned. However, in the later genealogies, his secular name became only one character, in accordance with his other eight brothers. His alter name and Buddhist name were also disclosed, and followed the local tradition of Pu'an 普庵 Buddhism, which was only popular after the Ming dynasty. Apparently some later compiler changed his secular name to make it consistent, and gave this important ancestor an alter name and a Buddhist name under the compiler's current fashion. However, the name in the fourteenth-century preface was not changed. *Gantang Zhang-shi jiapu*, 38, 75.

among the surname groups. There was a long process of negotiation, such as introducing “the two other wives” into the communal ritual, or establishing a fund to protect the mountains and forests shared by this alliance, and written texts were used to document the results of their negotiations. Only during the Yuan dynasty were these documents compiled into a set of coherent statement, which provided textual evidence to further legitimize this combination.

The case shows that even in the marginal mountains, written texts had been used during the Song-Yuan period, and in addition to the well-known elitist model, many texts were generated from the bottom level of the society. Even though the earlier documents cannot be completely certified, at least the frequent emphases on the support from written documents in this fourteenth-century compilation prove their concept about the credibility of written texts at the time when this “preface” was compiled. Although the primary material is from a genealogy, it actually sustains itself by citing the existence of various documents: official licenses, contracts, documents of house-dividing, accounts of lineage estates, and ritual registers. It was this mentality that encouraged a small group of educated people to generalize their diverse documents and made them a coherent genealogy.

Furthermore, this case also shows the nature of constructiveness in local texts. Instead of a neutral description of what had happened, this “preface” was shaped by the knowledge and the view of its compiler while it was produced in the fourteenth century, and its narrative was based on the materials that its compiler had and the story the compiler wanted to tell. Therefore, to interpret this kind of text, it is important to put it into its historical context and consider its process of production, including understanding the compiler’s intention. However, even though the text was intentionally constructed, it does

not mean it is not related to historical fact. What we need to do is try to discern how the information was deployed to match the compiler's intention, and how this text was used to respond to its historical background. This particular text, for example, illustrates the conditions when local descent groups in marginal mountains needed to organize themselves by proposing textual evidence. Instead of being directed by a certain set of ideologies, these activities were initiated by a series of challenges originating from competitions of natural resources ("guarding" the properties claimed to be left by the common ancestor), social conflicts and cooperation (confronting "neighbors" or bandits, making alliance of descent groups), and the extension of state power (official licenses and filing the lawsuits).

Even though the contents of these texts were not necessarily inherited by people in northern Gutian/Pingnan in later periods,⁶⁰ this model of textual production and the mentality toward written texts, which can be traced to the Song-Yuan period, repeatedly appeared during the Ming-Qing. The penetration of this model and mentality, and their interactions with local society became the main theme of my following chapters, and the principles of interpreting local texts displayed in this chapter are the primary methods throughout this dissertation.

The Zhang family's effort to build a lineage organization, however, did not last long. The narration of this preface ends at the early fourteenth century, and the final part of it has suggested social unrest during this period: their shrine was repeatedly destroyed either by

⁶⁰ The original alliance of the Zhangs in northern Gutian dissolved during the Song-Yuan-Ming transition. The next time any Zhang family in northern Gutian compiled a formal genealogy was in the 19th century. Although they tried to connect themselves to this older documents they preserved, it was very difficult to prove that they were the direct descendants of these recorded in the fourteen-century preface. For the later development, see Chapter 4.

the fights among lineage members or the attacks from mountain bandits and Mongol army. The great family in southern Gutian, such as the family of Zhang Yining in the county seat mentioned earlier, might be able to secure themselves from the disturbances during these two dynastic transitions, from Song to Yuan, and from Yuan to Ming, but in northern Gutian, the lack of records suggest that few could escape from the destructive local violence. Only after the Ming dynasty settled down and implemented an extensive bureaucratic system did we have the textual sources that depict the social order in these mountain villages.

Chapter 2

Documenting the Regime: Local Administration and Documentation in the Ming

There is a remarkable phenomenon in the historical narratives noted in the textual materials found in northern Gutian/Pingnan. The narratives could start from various periods, but the portion since the early Ming often renders more details in that dates were precisely recorded by reigns of emperors; locations were presented by jurisdictions of local administration, sometimes to the lowest level of Sector (*du* 都) and Plat (*tu* 圖). Of course, exceptions always exist: the detailed Song-Yuan information in the document I analyzed in the previous chapter is very exceptional. Generally, the narratives before the Ming were unorganized and anecdotal, and therefore as I discussed in Chapter 1, the narratives before the Ming seemed to be less reliable.

Moreover, in many historical narratives, “early Ming” was taken as an important turning point. Families, after tracing their winding history of migration from the central plain, claimed to settle in current location during the early Ming or in an earlier period, but narrators were able to provide the full name of their ancestors since the Ming. It would be unreasonable to believe that all the families suddenly moved to these valleys at the same time or started to remember the names of their ancestors from the same period. This phenomenon, which was shared by many places in southern and southeastern China, resulted from the historical formation of these historical narratives.¹ In these regions, early

¹ For the discussion on the cases in Guangdong, see Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian: Ming-Qing Guangdong diqu lijia fuyi zhidu yu xiangcun shehui* 在國家與社會之間:明清廣東地區里甲賦役制度與鄉村社會 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue, 2010), 243-250.

Ming was often the period when earliest textual records were available. The contents of these records hence became the factual basis of historical narratives when they were taking shape. Even though most of the original records during the early Ming no longer exist, their contents were inherited by later texts, and translated into various historical narratives, originating from the earliest written records. Instead of telling a historical fact, this “early Ming” phenomenon actually tells a “historical formation of fact.”

The availability of early Ming textual records is, by and large, the consequence of the reconstruction and extension of the official documentation system at the beginning of the Ming dynasty. This is not to say that official documents did not reach this area during the middle period, but they went deeper and wider to these villages in valleys. The penetration of official documentation system during this era not only influenced the formation of official documents, but also had significant impacts on non-official ones. These official and non-official documents shaped the modes that local communities interacted with the state and with one another, and provided the materials for later generations to reconstruct their history or even their identity.

This chapter begins with the establishment and limitation of the official documentation system during the early Ming, and subsequently discusses its impact on the textual culture in northeastern Fujian villages.

Official Documentation System in the Early Ming

Tradition of Documentation and the “New Institution”

To maintain a political entity as huge as the Chinese empire, a bureaucratic system with sufficient information of its subjects is necessary to manage its people and territory,

and to mobilize its manpower and economic resources. Written documents, used as the most important vehicles of communication and the records of information, thus played an important role. Based on the observation of historical and contemporary polities, Jack Goody argues that “writing is critical in the development of bureaucratic states, even though relatively complex forms of government are possible without it. Also, the adoption of writing for various purposes associated with the polity has implications for the conduct of its affairs at all levels.”² In this regard, the Chinese state has been particularly noted by social scientists and historians as one of the earliest bureaucratic states.

Chinese government certainly started to use written records in ruling its people and territory far before the Ming dynasty. Archaeologists found records of household information written on bamboo slips during the Qin and Han dynasties, and some recent studies claim that a refined bureaucratic system of the Chinese state was built as early as the Western Zhou.³ More official documents, especially written records of household registration, found in Dunhuang and other archaeological sites in western China, reveal the sophisticated documentation system of the Chinese state during the middle period.⁴ With the expansion of state power and advanced techniques of administration— such as woodblock printing – written documents played an important role in administering local jurisdictions during the Song-Yuan period in which government issued printed forms of documents to local administrators. Manuals published for officials and clerks taught them

² Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 91-92.

³ Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ Ikeda On 池田温, *Chūgoku kodai sekichō kenkyū* 中国古代籍帳研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1979).

the principles to manage various textual materials. “[Documentation] is the root of administration,” the key neo-Confucian philosopher, Zhu Xi (1130-1200), once commented after hearing that a magistrate lost his register of taxation records in a dialogue between him and his disciple.⁵ The Master knew it well: Zhu Xi started his career at twenty-one years old as assistant county magistrate (*zhubu* 主簿 literally “register manager”) of Tong’an 同安 County in southern Fujian.

After expelling the Mongolian rulers, the instant problem that the new Chinese emperor had to face was to control the vast territory and numerous subjects inherited from his predecessor. The situation was critical, since the core area of the empire was devastated by wars and countless upheavals, and the infrastructure of local administration was massively demolished. The ambitious Hongwu emperor, the first ruler of the Ming, installed a series of institutions, called “the Hongwu New Institutions” (*hongwu xinzhì* 洪武新制) by later historians. Many of these “new institutions” were actually the continuation of those of the previous dynasties, but further elaborated and regulated. Many of them were actually refined by his successors. Among his numerous institutions to reconstruct the imperial order, the most influential one on local administration should be the system of hereditary households.

In the system of hereditary household, all the subjects of the empire were categorized into several types of “households” (*hu* 戶). Different households had different responsibilities to the state: taxes, tributes, corvée labors, civil or military services. One’s obligations to the state were decided by the type of household that one’s family registered

⁵ Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, v.111, 2714.

in official records. For example, families registered as a military household had to provide one adult male to the army and support his expenses; families registered as a craftsman household had to serve in official manufactories. Since these registered households and their obligations were hereditary and hardly changeable, the purpose of this system was to make sure that the government could collect a certain amount of taxes and mobilize manpower as needed. Moreover, this system attempted to attach each subject to a fixed registered household, so that a local administrator could easily handle the subjects in his jurisdiction. Ideally, different types of household were conducted by different administrative institutions, and everyone's actions were directed by one's registered status.

This system of hereditary household was inherited from the hereditary occupational household system during the Yuan period, but the Ming rulers made it more inclusive and more regulated. The Ming government used this system to categorize its subjects. Throughout the Ming dynasty, registered households became the basic unit by which the state governed its people. Local administrators collected taxes and mobilized manpower according to the records of registered households within their jurisdictions, and submitted the registered portion to the central government.

This system of hereditary household, theoretically, depended upon accurate and comprehensive information of each local family, including its members, its property and its registered location, so as for local administrators to know where and how much they could extract. Moreover, this information had to be frequently updated so that the administrators could catch up with the changes of local population and property ownerships. In order to maintain reliable records of these households, the Ming government had to establish a comprehensive system of documentation. While the scale of

documentation system expanded, more officials and clerks were involved in these processes of survey, recording, editing and revision.

The Ming rulers realized the importance of documentation at the very beginning. Before his regime could control the whole China, the Hongwu emperor had required his army to collect local archives created from the previous government, which were largely destroyed or lost during the wars of political transition. One of the first tasks the Hongwu emperor started was land survey and household registration. He issued several orders encouraging people who had fled from their residences to register with local authorities by exonerating them from punishment. In 1370, the third year of his reign, the emperor initiated registration by issuing a household certificate (*hutie* 戶帖) to each household in the territories under his control.⁶ His proclamation, written in vernacular languages and printed on the household certificate, became an important historical text for the early effort of household registration.⁷ In 1381, a nationwide registration system of commoner households was institutionalized. Its overall structure was not only used throughout the Ming, but also followed by the subsequent Qing dynasty. This system, usually referred to by the name of the archive, “Yellow Registers,” became the most important documentation system for local administration throughout the late imperial China.⁸

⁶ *Ming shilu* 明實錄, v.35, 634; *Daming hudian* 大明會典, 19/19

⁷ This proclamation was copied in several gazetteers and *biji*. One of the most quoted sources is from Li Xü's (1505-1593) 李詡 *Jie'an laoren manbi* 戒庵老人漫筆, prefaced in 1597. According to Li Xü, the household certificate and the proclamation were rarely seen in his time. Li Xü, *Jie'an laoren manbi* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982), 34-35. Some pieces of original household certificates from the Hongwu reign survived, see picture 1 in Ruan Chengxian 樂成顯, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu* 明代黃冊研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1998). The English translation of this proclamation can be found in Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 4-5.

⁸ The study of Yellow Register system was inaugurated by Liang Fangzhong's 梁方仲 important article, “Mingdai huangce kao 明代黃冊考,” which gave an outline of the whole system. Our understanding has

Certainly household registration did not start from the early Ming either. Bureaucrats always had to first establish a procedure to manage its administrative records. Compared to the previous procedure of household registration, the significance of “Yellow Registers” and its persistence through more than five hundred years can be summarized from two aspects. First, this system was highly regulated and vertically integrated into the imperial administrative hierarchy. Second, this system was also horizontally integrated into local administrative units, especially the county government and *lijia* 里甲 system.

Centralizing Information within the Hierarchy

The operation of the Yellow Registers system was highly regulated. The form of the Register was strictly controlled, including the color of paper (yellow), the script, the size of characters, and the space between lines. Entry of each “household” included the registered names of household, family members (names, ages and relationships) and property registered under this household. After county magistrate and his clerks received the records from local communities, they had to check the returns and compiled two copies of the county Yellow Register. After properly signing and sealing, a copy was submitted to the prefectural government, where the prefectural Yellow Register was compiled. The prefect and his subordinates collected all the county Yellow Registers within his administration, and then compiled, checked, signed, and sealed the prefectural Yellow Register and submitted a copy of the prefectural Yellow Register to the Provincial Administrative

been further enriched by Wei Qingyuan’s 韋慶遠 careful investigation on every stage of compilation and development, and by Ruan Chengxian’s detailed research on related documents in different periods. Liang Fangzhong, “Mingdai huangce kao” in *Liang Fangzhong jingjishi lunwenji* 梁方仲經濟史論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989, firstly published in 1949); Wei Qingyuan, *Mingdai huangce zhidu* 明代黃冊制度 (Beijing: Zhonghua 1961). Also see Ruan, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu*.

Commission. The Provincial Administrative Commissioner and his clerks collected all the prefectural Yellow Registers and compiled a provincial one. After the same procedure of certification, the provincial Yellow Registers were submitted to the central government at the end of year. These provincial Yellow Registers were checked by officials and students in the National Academy and stored in special archival houses situated on an island at Hinter Lake (*houhu* 後湖) in Nanjing.⁹

Every ten years the Yellow Register was revised in what was called “grand compilation” (*dazao* 大造). The whole procedure from local communities, counties, prefectural, provincial governments and central archives of the Hinter Lake had to repeat again. The county government had to compare the written information collected from its jurisdiction with the previous one, update the changes of members and properties in each household, and depending on the change of registered population, decide whether the current division of local administration had to be rearranged or not. These updated Registers would transfer again along different layers of governments so that each layer, from county to the central government, could obtain the updated information from the revised Registers. The whole process of grand compilation was pre-scheduled, and each layer of government had to strictly follow the timeline. In the following ten years, these revised Registers became the basis for local administration. Taxes and manpower were levied and deployed to each layer of government in accordance with these newest written records.¹⁰

⁹ *Daming huidian*, 20/1b-4b, 7a-8b. These registers were placed on an island to prevent the loss from fire. The regulations on the management of Hinter Lake Archives can be found in *Houhu zhi* 後湖志.

¹⁰ *Daming huidian*, 20/4b.

This highly regulated procedure of check and update was to make sure that information could be precisely and timely circulated within the administrative hierarchy. When the information was conflicted at the lower level, clerks could go back to the registers stored in higher-level administrations, and even go to the Hinter Lake Archives in Nanjing. The lower layers of administrators followed the information of registers and the higher ones supervised them according to the same registers collected from them. This whole system was established on the basis that the process of documentation and its forms were nationwide standardized so that different layers of governments in different regions of the empire could easily share the same information, and these records were eventually stored in the central archives, supervised by the central government.

Moreover, this system also had to rely on numerous clerks and scribes in each layer of administrations. In order to manage these documents and their transmission, the state had to develop a large group of skilled and experienced clerks and scribes in many different bureaus. These clerks and scribes shared similar knowledge of making official documents and together became a distinguished and universal group of literates.

From the perspective of the central government, the documentation system collected and transmitted local information to the state so that the centralized state could supervise and manage its subjects within the administrative hierarchy. From the perspective of local communities, this centralized and standardized process of documentation brought a universal culture of governmentality down to the local. Even though each community was quite different in many different ways, they shared the same official documents and went through the same process of documentation. In other words, the documentation system not only served as an important component of centralized governance, but also formulated a

sense of “being governed” upon local people through this repeated procedure. While most studies on official collection of information tend to stand on the stance of the government and simply take it as a characteristic of bureaucratization or a means of control and surveillance from the state, its influence on local communities should also be considered.

Local Administration and the Penetration of Official Document

The transmission of Yellow Register was integrated into the administrative hierarchy, and at the lowest level, its operation was closely attached to the *lijia* system, which was the local administrative unit beyond registered households and below county government. According to the information of initial registration, the early Ming government assigned every one hundred and ten registered households as a “community” (*li* 里). Ten most affluent households among them were appointed as “chief household of tithing” (*jiashou hu* 甲首戶), and every chief household of tithing led other ten registered households together as a “tithing” (*jia* 甲). Ideally, these ten chief households were the agents of government, who had to collect taxes, distribute corvée labor, and other state obligations for their own tithing. They also had to take turns to be the “community head” (*lizhang* 里長). In their turn of being the head, this chief household had to collect the taxes that other nine chief households of tithing collected from the ten households, and submit the taxes to county government. The community head was also responsible for all the other obligations, such as sending tributes to local government and arranging manpower to make sure that all the labor services registered in official records were fulfilled. The ideal of *lijia* system was to build a stable administrative structure at the lowest level of society, which was led by local leaders, and these local leaders took the responsibility to fulfill local obligations to the

state. This was particularly important during the early Ming when local orders were destroyed and the infrastructure of the state was still being rebuilt.

Under the *lijia* system, the role of chief households of tithing and the community head became very important. Officially designated, they became the bridge between government and local people. These wealthy families, taking official responsibility, gradually became leaders of various local affairs. Among their many official responsibilities, one of them was that chief households had to, at least nominally, manage the registration records of their tithing. According to the design of Yellow Registers system, these heads and chiefs were the key components to the compilation of local records. Local authorities issued forms of household registration, which were printed in provincial capitals, to each chief household of tithing. These chief households had to fill out the form for the households registered under their tithing, updating the changes of family members and property transactions in every registered household. After collecting forms from chief households of tithing, community heads had to compile the Yellow Registers of his community, make a map, or a “plat” (圖 *tu*),¹¹ to summarize the composition of its households, and submit a copy to the county government. Based on these Yellow Registers of *lijia*, county officials and clerks compiled a “Yellow Register of County,” serving as the basis of county administration.

How the information of local families was collected before the early Ming is different from time to time, but mostly these registers were compiled by officials or clerks sent from county government or appointed by county magistrate. During the Song dynasties, local government drafted literate and experienced scribes to manage documents

¹¹ Afterwards, the character *tu* was used to designate a Community in the Pingnan-Gutian area.

of taxation, land or household registration.¹² When the Ming reconstructed the documentation system in the early years, the government tried to integrate the local-level documentation into the self-monitoring *lijia* system, and made local leaders managed the initial documentation. While documentation also became the task of *lijia*, the consequence is that from the early Ming on, local people were more involved in the process of documentation. Even though in later periods many chief households and community heads started to hire professional scribes to do this work, these local leaders still had to fulfill their official duties according to written registers and other written documents. In other words, the integration of *lijia* and Yellow Registers enhanced the process of documentation at the lowest local level.

Moreover, with the ambition of Ming government to impose the *lijia* system upon the entire realm and cover all the commoner households, more and more local communities joined this process of documentation. Some families had been registered in official records, but since related documents had been managed by professional clerks before, local people did not need to manage their own official documents. With the combination of *lijia* and Yellow Register systems, at least the appointed chief households had to deal with local documents. They had to collect the registration data, revise the registers during the year of grand compilation, and keep the records during the rest of years. In some marginal communities, local families were previously unregistered, or lost their registrations because of wars or migration, but during the early Ming, many were registered, and

¹² Umehara Kaoru 梅原郁, “Sōdai no kyōji: sono ichizuke wo kutte 宋代の郷司: その位置づけをくって,” *Liu Zijian boshi songshou jinian Songshi yanjiu lunji* 劉子健博士頌壽紀念宋史研究論集 (Tōkyō: Dōhōsha, 1989), 197-212

included into the *lijia* system. They thus became “documented subjects,” and joined the culture of documentation.

Yellow Register was created to cover all the commoner households under the *lijia* system, and for other types of hereditary households, the Ming government also created different documentation systems to establish their records and trace their lives.¹³ Most of these types were occupational, such as households of fisherman or households of craftsman.¹⁴ According to the specific administrators of each type, their documents were managed by their local administration.

Next to commoner households, military households should be the second important type among all households, especially in Fujian, where an extraordinarily large number of households were registered as military households. Some records suggest that during the early Ming, the number of military households was almost one half of the number of commoner households in Fujian. Since the numbers of other types were small, it means that there was almost one military household in every three registered households.¹⁵ To make sure that a steady number of adult males could be drafted into the army, and a new adult male could be instantly drafted to replace the soldier who died or escaped, various records about military households, such as so-called “Yellow Registers of Military Households,” were made and maintained by different levels of local authorities and

¹³ Ruan, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu*, 35-40.

¹⁴ A Fujian gazetteer lists seven types of households during the early Ming, but the total number of types is unclear. The seven types are: commoners, soldiers, salt-makers, craftsmen, local militia, station soldiers, and doctors. See He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, *Minshu* 閩書 (Fuzhou: Fujian remin, 1994), 958.

¹⁵ This was in part because many soldiers were required to pacify local disturbances in the early Ming, and partly because many “untamed population,” such as criminals, bandits, or “mountain people,” were put into this category. See He, *ibid*; Yu, *Mingdai junhu shixi zhidu*, 10-26.

administered by the Board of War. The operation of military documentation was also highly regulated and closely integrated into military administration.¹⁶

The Culture of Documentation and Its Spread

The documentation system during the early Ming created a mode of local administration highly dependent on the compilation of written records. Although most of these documents had their origins in previous dynasties and their use in the early Ming largely depended on the institutions developed during the Song-Yuan periods, the incorporation with bureaucratic hierarchy and local organizations further institutionalized them. In order to establish various registrations and fulfill the requirement of the decennial grand compilation, more documents – licenses, receipts, certificates – were created for record keeping. To sustain itself, one documentation system requires many subsidiary documents, and, compared to the Yellow Registers, which were revised every ten years, these documents further penetrated into local communities.¹⁷

The traces of early Ming documentation in northern Gutian are remarkable. For example, a genealogy compiled in the early seventeenth century precisely states that their families “started to establish a [registered] household in the fifth year of the Hongwu emperor’s reign (1372),” and lists all the changes of household registration in the following lines. Their records of household registrations precisely include the years of changes and the exact community and tithing. In another case, even the serial number (*haoshu* 號數) of the household certificate during the Hongwu reign was provided in a document compiled

¹⁶ For various registers created for military households and their operation see: *Daming huidian*, 155/23b-40a and Wei, *Mingdai huangce zhidu*, 54-72.

¹⁷ For these subsidiary documents, see Ruan, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu*, 88-95.

almost one hundred years later, and this document was repeatedly copied in their lineage compilations.¹⁸ The compilers of these documents could still have the detailed information of their families several hundred years earlier because of the operation of official documentation, including record-keeping and regular revisions. When families had the need to compile their own documents, the information from these official records became an important and reliable source.¹⁹ From the fact that the early Ming household and other information was recorded in local documents and we can still access to it, we know the official documentation system, if not earlier, reached to northern Gutian during the early Ming. Although some records said the families started to have their “household” during the Hongwu reign, these families might have been registered in official records during the Song and the Yuan. However, only after the extensive implementation of this self-monitoring administrative system and the related documentation, the culture of documentation further prevailed in this area and local families could maintain their early written records.

This is certainly not a unique phenomenon in northern Gutian. In southern China, the earliest and detailed information about official registration, names of family members and family property that we can find from village documents is mostly from the early Ming. This phenomenon frequently appeared in marginal communities. For example, the genealogies of many marginal communities in mountains or along rivers and seacoasts in Guangdong often claim that their ancestors obtained a registered household in the early

¹⁸ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu* 瑞雲姚氏族譜, 19 and *Boyuan Su-shi jiapu* 柏源蘇氏家譜, 15.

¹⁹ In a particular case in Guangdong, in order to compile their genealogy, a family was permitted to look up the Yellow Register in the provincial bureau for the early history of their family. See Liu, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian*, 192-193.

Ming and many were categorized as military households or households of fisherman. Some scholars argue that these records suggest an early Ming policy to put these groups, often labelled as ethnic minorities, into official registration records and try to turn them into “documented subjects” of the empire.²⁰ The prevalence of this kind of records implies that the reconstruction of local administration during the early Ming deeply influenced local textual culture in southern China, especially for the marginal communities and social stratum which were not usually involved in the process of official documentation.

This development was quite similar to that of early modern Japan. In Richard Rubinger’s study of popular literacy in Japan, he argues that during the late sixteenth century toward the Tokugawa period, village headmen were granted more duties of local administration, including collecting taxes and keeping official records. They also managed more local affairs, such as conducting village finances, or petitioning to their feudal lords. So these local leaders had to keep various village records and learn to write a petition.²¹ In other words, in both Japan and China, the changing mode of local administration, on the one hand, released more room for local leaders to manage village affairs; on the other hand, this change also encouraged the spread of textual culture to marginal regions and rural communities.

²⁰ Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*, 71; Liu, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian*, 34-37.

²¹ Richard Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 18-30.

Limits of Official Documentation System

If we simply follow official sources, it seems that the Ming government successfully built an effective institution of local administration, as well as official documentation, since its earliest stage. However, throughout the Ming dynasty, the attempt to “manage by documents” encountered several difficulties. Although evidence shows that official documents did reach northern Gutian and many marginal societies, at least to its local leaders, it does not mean that the Ming government “controlled” local communities with these official records. The intention to establish a standard, stable and efficient institution of local administration was challenged by the limit of techniques and the scale of Chinese empire.

Challenges to Standardization: Regional Variations

First, it seems that the Ming government attempted to establish a universal institution of local administration over its realm, but whether this institution was universally built up at the beginning is highly doubted. Many local gazetteers have a section for biographies of “outstanding officials.” By celebrating the ethical or executive attainments of selected officials, these biographies promoted an ideal image of local officials, as well as an ideal condition of local administration. Among various attainments, sometimes local officials, especially the first or first several county magistrates of a new dynasty, were praised for being able to “make those who escaped all come back to his jurisdiction” or “clear up the records of household registration.” For example, the Gutian County Magistrate during the Yongle period (1403-1424) was celebrated for “making the runaways come back and

keeping the county stable and peaceful.²²” This description suggests that, after the violent political transition and social unrests, there were many people who still “escaped” from official control, even during the Yongle period, several decades after the implantation of the *lijia* system and the compilation of first Yellow Registers. “Out of official control” in this context usually means “out of official registration.” The fact that his achievement of “making people come back and be registered” was outstanding and worthy to be listed as his primary merit implies that this is an extraordinary condition, and the usual case is that the *lijia* system did not include all the people within the jurisdiction. While many people were officially registered and put into the *lijia* system, there were often people who escaped from official registration. Within a county, the status of registration was not always the same.

It is easy to imagine the difficulty in extensively implementing a complicated local administrative structure such as the *lijia* system and making all families within the territories registered. Although post-war armies helped at the initial stage, the whole bureaucratic system of this new regime was still recovering, and numerous literate and experienced clerks were required to execute this project. During the establishment of the *lijia* system, region variation can be observed from the actual execution of local documentation. Since the initial registration had to rely on previous documents and the aid of local clerks, regions that kept more previous documents intact and better literary and administrative infrastructures had more success in establishing an extensive local administrative and documentation system. For example, in 1386, more than one thousand

²² *Wanli Gutian xianzhi* 萬曆古田縣志, 113.

National University students were sent to help the land survey and registration in Zhejiang.²³ This was unimaginable for poorer or less “cultural” provinces.

The regional variations of this policy can also be observed in border regions and newly incorporated territories. For example, according to a statute in 1391 from the *Collected Statutes of the Great Ming*, in some “vulgar border places ruled by chieftains” in Yunnan, the administrators were permitted to do the registration in their own way and did not have to strictly follow the nationwide *lijia* system. Only for the “tamed places ruled by Chinese bureaucrats and local chieftains,” the Yellow Register had to be followed. In the jurisdiction of Bozhou 播州, only those who spoke Chinese had to be registered, and for several jurisdictions in Guizhou overwhelmingly dominated by “barbarians,” local officials were permitted not to make the Yellow Registers. Another statute in 1455 also permitted several jurisdictions in Sichuan not to make the Yellow Registers.²⁴ These exceptions in southwestern China show that the presumed universalism of the *lijia* system and Yellow Register, “all the jurisdictions under the heaven,” as proclaimed in the 1381 edict,²⁵ was rather rhetorical. Considering the diversity of regional conditions and the limited scale of early Ming government, the ideal to universally record all families under the heaven was in fact impossible.

²³ Ho Ping-ti, *Zhongguo lidai tudi shuzi kaoshi* 中國歷代土地數字考實 (Taipei: Lianjing, 1995), 77.

²⁴ *Daming huidian*, 20/10a.

²⁵ *Daming huidian*, 19/a1.

Challenges to Stability: Restless Souls

Another factor complicating the efficacy of registration is, even though local families were registered, the limited power of local administration could not stop them from abandoning their household registration and moving somewhere else. The simplistic ideal of the *lijia* system is to build a fixed structure of society, within which the duties of each family to the government is hereditary and each family is fastened to the grid within this structure. The attempt of the *lijia* system is to make sure that all the duties can be perpetually fulfilled in a stable condition. However, how to make local families fixed onto the grid, which was actually constructed by written documents, was challenging.

The correlation between the actual status of a family and its household registration could be easily broken. First of all, the scale of a family was not always the same. After several generations, a family could grow into a huge conglomeration, or, to the other extreme, dissolved. For the former one, how to distribute the obligations to the state among the members of a registered household could be a cause of serious disputes. For the later one, the obligations of this household were also dissolved. Although the changing status of a family should be updated during the grand compilation, and under some restriction, a registered household could be officially split into two or more, there was a ten-year interval and not all the families followed these regulations. The gap between the registered status of a family in official records and its actual status provided room for them to lessen their official burden or acquire some privileges.

Whether a family expanded or not, it was common for a family to move away from its original registered unit to look for a better life. It happened much often in the time when economic activities were emergent, or in a marginal region where the natural sources could

not feed all the people. Fujian mountains from the mid-Ming to the end of dynasty perfectly fit in both conditions.

Most settlements in northern Gutian were situated in the small basins along the upper branches of Min River and Huotong River, where arable land was meager. The cold and humid climate in mountain areas further limited the growth of agricultural production. As I mentioned in the introduction, the farmers in northern Gutian could only have one harvest each year, while most farmlands in south China could produce two to three harvests. When the population of settlements grew, farmers were forced to move upward the valleys and open up new land. Although several small-scale irrigation systems were built following the colonization of river valleys, slash-and-burn was still common until at least the early-seventeenth century, and it was recorded by officials in their poems as a strange local custom.²⁶ This way of production, which was later regarded as an ethnic mark of the She 畚 people, encouraged local people to move around and not to settle on the same piece of land. Moreover, after potatoes came to southern China from the New World during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth,²⁷ farmers could utilize the small flat grounds among the mountains to grow this new produce, which could survive the cold and humid climate in mountains. This new source of food turned the tiny barren basins in upper valleys into tolerable residence.

Moreover, under the population pressure since the mid-Ming, not only local residents in Fujian mountains but also the people along lower rivers started to migrate to

²⁶ Field-burning was frequently described by poets to illustrate local scenes in Gutian during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as “Farmers burn the field with raging fire/passersby carry a pole with stinky seafood.” *Yutian shilue* 玉田識略, 1/5.

²⁷ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 76.

the previously unproductive upper valleys and establish new settlements in deep mountains. Many genealogies of this region claim their ancestors moved to current locations during the mid-Ming. They followed either the upper branches of Huotong River or the upper branches of Min River to northern Gutian. These people illegally abandoned their original household registration, but did not necessarily register under the government of their new location.

In addition to land-seeking immigrants, another unregistered group of people were those who came for the natural resources in mountains. Forests, streams and mines provided the energy and raw sources. Since the Song dynasty, people came to Fujian mountains to build paper mills and iron furnaces.²⁸ During the Ming dynasty, mushroom collectors, indigo planters and timber merchants came from one mountain to another. The growth of market economy since the mid-Ming encouraged more people to extract sources from mountains, turn these raw materials into commodities to sell in markets.²⁹ In the mountain area nearby Gutian, the most important sources was silver, the primary metal for currency during the late imperial period. Some silver mines had been opened during the Song, but in the Ming dynasty, the rise of market economy induced several waves of silver crazes, and attracted more people to join this industry.

While some economic activities in mountains, such as collecting mushrooms, were rather individual and small-scaled, silver mining required more capitals, labors and

²⁸ *Chunxi sanshan zhi*, 164.

²⁹ For example, according to a late-fifteenth-century provincial gazetteer, six iron mines, two silver mines, four iron-smelting workshops and fourteen furnaces were reported in Gutian County. According to an early seventeenth century county gazetteer, the number of silver mines rose to four, and the peak number of iron furnaces reached eighteen. See *Bamin tongzhi* 八閩通志 (Fuzhou: Fujian remin, 2006), 697 and *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 64-65.

organization. The leader of silver mining had to organize a large group of mining workers. These workers did not produce food, did not attach to lands, and worked in deep mountains. They were mostly migrant workers who left their native household registrations, and were organized by the leaders. Throughout most of the Ming dynasty, silver mining was monopolized by the state, but even though private silver mining was frequently banned and very high taxes were collected when they were permitted, their high profits attracted people all around Fujian, inland Zhejiang, and Jiangxi.

Because of the economic development during the Ming, it became very difficult to tie a family to its registered household. Many Gutian residents moved from their original settlements for a better life, and many land-seeking immigrants moved to the upper valleys in Gutian. Many migrant labors or collectors came to Gutian for its natural sources, and many Gutian residents travelled around nearby counties to be hired as temporary workers. Most of these restless people were not attached to the *lijia* system and had escaped from their original registration. These “tax-escapers” (*bufu zhi tu* 逋賦之徒), called by local officials, were not in the official records of their current residence, did not pay taxes to the government, and usually could not be mobilized by the government, either. This situation was particularly serious during the late Ming. The compiler of the county gazetteer of Yongfu 永福, a neighboring county of Gutian, in the early sixteenth century reviewed household registration and pointed out that two to three tenths of the registered fields were actually owned by people living outside Yongfu County. This means that the households in the Yellow Register were not all residents in this county. Meanwhile, immigrants from inland and southern Fujian were all over the mountains and valleys. They were the residents of this county but not registered. These immigrants were “outlaws” in their own

counties, but some of them had lived in Yongfu for several generations, never being drafted or taxed by local authorities.³⁰

As for Gutian, local officials also complained that these “outlaws” congregating in the mountainous north part and did not follow official instructions. The compiler of the official gazetteer in 1600 claimed that “those workers, craftsmen, and runners mostly came from other counties; they are complicated and troublesome. For the petty dwellers in the meager countryside, such as the Twenty-Eighth Sector and Twenty-Ninth Sector (both in northern Gutian), there are always cases of malicious accusation, tax evasion and robbery. This is maybe because it is truly difficult to make a living there, or probably because the routes there are difficult to go through but easy [for outlaws] to hide.”³¹ In an announcement written by a county magistrate in the 1630s, the official condemned the people in the Twenty-Third Sector, who robbed passengers, refused to pay taxes, and never obeyed official orders. Even local clerks and runners knew that “the people in the Twenty-Third Sector are not constrained by the law.”³² Some of these difficult people in northern Gutian might have been registered since the early Ming, but most of them were new immigrants from other counties or locals who tried to escape from their duties.

These descriptions and complaints from local officials during the late Ming revealed that the *lijia* system established in the early Ming did not function well during this period. One important factor was the mobility of people whom official documentation could not trace well. These restless people and empty registered households show that the attempt to

³⁰ Wanli Yongfu xianzhi 萬曆永福縣志, 24.

³¹ Wanli Gutian xianzhi, 8.

³² Yang Dezhou 楊德周, “Xiaoyu er-shi-san du gaowen, 曉諭二十三都告文” *Yutian shilue* 8/2b-5a.

establish a stable structure of local administration could not catch up with the immediate changes of society.

Challenges to Efficiency: Bureaucratization and the Rise of Scribes

The first two challenges came from outer conditions: physically a vast territory with diverse communities, and temporally changing socio-economic structures. The third one came from the operation of the system itself. The whole system of official documentation, including repetitive investigations and confirmations in different layers of administrative institutions, regularly revisions in ten-year intervals, long-distance transmission and mass storage, required the support from a large number of scribes and clerks. According to the original design, the documents in different layers of administration should be able to correspond exactly with one another, and the recorded information should be able to match the newest status at the lowest level so that local officials could precisely handle the subjects within their jurisdictions, and higher officials could supervise the lower ones. However, because of the complexity of accumulated documents and the limited techniques of textual duplications and transmission, it gradually became difficult for the system to be operated in the way it was supposed to be. Moreover, since the management of these documents in each administration became so complicated and specific, the role of clerks and scribes became very important. This situation was particularly obvious at the local level, given that clerks and scribes were those who directly collected the information, turned it into texts, copied and reported them to higher institutions, but there were usually few locals were literate enough to serve these roles.

One obvious consequence of increasing paperwork in the local administration was the elevation of the status of scribes, and it certainly did not start from the Ming dynasty.

Managing documents always played a crucial role in local government. As mentioned earlier, the title of assistant county magistrate, the third-rank official in county administration, literally means “register manager” (*zhubu* 主簿), and was also used as a common title for secretaries managing documents in official bureaus. This title had existed since the Han dynasty.³³ From the early Song, county governments drafted clerks from households that paid a certain amount of taxes to manage official documents as a kind of mandatory civil service. The number of clerks that a county government could draft was initially set up according to the size of the county. However, with a growing population, county governments had to draft additional scribes to deal with the mounting paperwork. After a series of reforms in the eleventh century, those temporarily drafted scribes became permanent positions, enabling county governments to draft even more scribes. Furthermore, instead of passively drafting clerks and scribes from local households under the service system, people with a certain level of literacy and a certain amount of estates could volunteer to serve as clerks and scribes. These institutional changes show the increasing need of specialized personnel to manage increasing documents at the local level. According to records that are currently available, during the Xining 熙寧 period (1068-1077), the Gutian County government could formally draft seventeen clerks. One hundred years later in the Chunxi 淳熙 period (1174-1189), besides ten clerks, the Gutian government could draft another thirty county scribes — although generally speaking, the number of scribes at the county level was still insufficient.³⁴

³³ Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 182.

³⁴ *Chunxi sanshan zhi*, 145-146.

Besides clerks and scribes in county governments, canton scribes (*xiang shushou* 鄉書手) served in cantons and managed local documents at the county level. They dealt mostly with local taxation registers. At the beginning of the Song dynasty, canton scribes were appointed from households in good standing as assistants of village heads (*lizheng* 里正), who were appointed leaders of neighboring groups of one hundred households.³⁵ According to gazetteers, each canton could have one canton scribe. For example, in Gutian County, there were four canton scribes serving in four cantons.³⁶

From the eleventh century on, canton scribes were gradually professionalized and no longer drafted from local households. As the literate people who had a fair understanding on the official documents and bureaucracy, their role changed from assistants in the keeping of tax records to agents of tax collection and negotiators between local authorities and common people. Canton scribes did not draw a salary, but made money from their literary skills and their privilege of controlling official documents. For example, the transfer of land ownership during the Song dynasty had to be recorded in official registers by canton scribes. In order to avoid heavy taxes, people would bribe canton scribes to change the registered amount in the transaction. As a result, in the latter half of the Song dynasty, more and more regulations were made to supervise canton scribes' behavior.³⁷

The professionalization of local scribes continued throughout the Ming dynasty. In the early Ming, according to the design of the Hongwu emperor, it was chief households of

³⁵ Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 303; Brian McKnight, *Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China*, 23-24.

³⁶ *Chunxi sanshan zhi*, 159.

³⁷ For more comprehensive studies on Canton scribes see Umehara Kaoru, "Sōdai no kyōji: sono ichi zuke wo kutte," 197-212.

tithing and community head who had to deal with household registration. This arrangement was partly aimed to stop the corruption of professional canton scribes from previous dynasties and make local people directly manage their documents. The consequence of this arrangement, as I argued above, is to increase local involvement with official documentation. However, although these chief households were selected from rich families, not all of them had the skill and knowledge to deal with official documents, especially in marginal regions where the literacy level was low. It became common for chief households to hire “community scribes” (*lishu*, 里書) during the period of grand compilation to revise their Yellow Registers.

From the late fifteenth century, more and more problems related to community scribes were reported to the central government. The most general problem was that community scribes were bribed by powerful families to fabricate registration records, which helped avoiding duties, such as land taxes or military service.³⁸ The problem became so serious that in 1490 the central government laid out a procedure of supervision including punishment for community scribes who fabricated records, and for local officials who failed to supervise scribes’ behaviors. However, an announcement in the following year exonerated those who came to local authorities to correct previous fabricated records. The exoneration in this case shows the difficulty in executing these punishments thoroughly.³⁹ Local administrations relied on these professional clerks and scribes who stayed long in their location and knew the localities and procedures that rotating county magistrates needed to get things done.

³⁸ *Daming huidian*, 19b-20a; 20/6a.

³⁹ *Daming huidian*, 20/6b-7a.

In marginal and less “literate” counties, such as those in inland Fujian, less local leaders had the ability to deal with official documents and the domination of clerks and scribes in local administration was overwhelming. According to the seventeenth-century county magistrate and famous drama and short story writer Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1547-1646), in Shouning 壽寧, a county north of Gutian, although clerks and scribes in the county government were so incompetent that they had to hire experienced compilers from other counties during the grand compilation and when revising general personnel accounts, local people were in awe of them and called the clerks “Gentleman” and the scribes “Sir.”⁴⁰ At the local level, community scribes dominated the compilation of official documents. Because chief households of tithing could not compile the Yellow Register by themselves during the grand compilation, locals had to hire professional scribes, and many scribes undertook the Register of more than one community. In the name of buying paper or candles, they would charge high fees even before compiling. After starting the compilation, they kept the Registers in their houses and asked for more money or they would not do the work and return the documents. As a result, when the county magistrate Feng Menglong came to Shouning, the Yellow Register were already two years late from the official deadline and locals had to pay a penalty for late submission. Moreover, those scribes did not compile the Yellow Register carefully, and their work was always full of mistakes. When these mistakes were discovered by superiors, locals had to

⁴⁰ Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Shouning daizhi* 壽寧待志, 2/2a-5a.

pay the penalty again. The county magistrate claimed that this was one of the greatest expenses that drove locals to bankruptcy.⁴¹

Community scribes in Nanping 南平 County, another mountain county near Gutian, were also powerful. A late sixteenth-century county magistrate called them the greatest trouble makers of local society. According to the county magistrate who wrote a report to his superior, community scribes did not return to other professions after the completion of the Yellow Register. Rather, they got together and claimed themselves “outer scribes,” modeled on the “inner scribes” who served in the county seat with a formal position. They asked for donations from local people every year, and some of them took donations from more than one community. While state taxes were of a set amount, donations to the scribes was not regulated and how much one had to pay was decided by the request of the scribes and how the chief households distributed this donation to each household. Therefore, even the poorest household had to pay a large amount of donation. According to the local gazetteer, more than three thousand taels of silver were paid to the group of scribes each year.⁴² Community scribes not only fabricated records to make profits, but also became a peculiar stratum in some marginal counties directly extracting money from local people.

These complaints from county magistrates might be biased, since the conflicts between rotating county magistrates and local clerks were predictable. However, these cases still show that as the paperwork of local administration grew, local scribes with their professional skills became a privileged group that local authorities had little control over. Even for those diligent county magistrates, such as the one in Shouning and the one in

⁴¹ Feng, *Shouning daizhi*, 2a/4a.

⁴² *Kangxi Nanping xianzhi* 康熙南平縣志, 9/6b-10a.

Nanping, there was not much to do more than recording the situation or reporting to his superior. For most county magistrates who did not have enough power or ability to supervise these scribes, all they had to do was fulfill the basic requirements of the state—collecting enough taxes on time and providing enough labor. Therefore, even though the registration of estates and adult males did not match the reality, if county magistrates could fulfill the requirement of the written record, everything would be fine from the stance of county magistrate. How taxes were collected or how adult males were drafted was left to local agents, who were usually the alliances between powerful local families and community scribes.

From the view of the government, these people with literary skills were crucial to maintain the whole system of local administration and documentation, but they were also difficult to control. Local scribes not only had the skills and knowledge, but also were familiar with local customs. On the contrary, county magistrates were rotating outsiders to the jurisdictions, and actually did not have many resources to use. From the middle to the late imperial period, following the increasing use of paperwork at the local level, this problem became serious. It became a heavy financial burden to include all scribes in the official staff and pay them with local budgets. The Song government tried to make it a mandatory service and actively selected scribes from local families. The Ming government tried to grant more autonomy to local communities and let local leaders do this work. However, since the skills of writing, editing and documenting required longtime training and experiences, neither could stop the trend of professionalization and the rising status of scribes in local society. Making local people manage their own documents was an arrangement to prevent corrupted clerks and scribes during the Song; however, this policy

increased the dependence on written documents, and unintentionally made more scribes penetrate into the lowest level of society, which in turn accelerated the tendency that had existed in previous dynasties.

Not paid by the government, these scribes used their literary skills to support themselves: asking bribes from local people to manipulate official records for them.⁴³ To local officials, if their interests were not seriously in conflict with that of the state, probably the easiest way to handle this was to tolerate them. A gazetteer compiler in northeastern Fujian lamented that the fact that the registered households in their district during the Jiajing period (1522-1566) was only one-third of the number during the Hongwu period (1368-1398). This decline could be ascribed not only to natural attrition or disasters but also to numerous “hidden families.” He continued: “Since officials above only care about whether the money they collect is enough without attention to those hidden families, and the local families below, although nominally having a heavy tax burden, actually distribute this burden to [the weak ones], both officials and local families are satisfied with current conditions.” However, this only benefited those who “had a large group with numerous members of the same surname,” but not the weak families who had to suffer even heavier burdens of taxation and compulsory service.⁴⁴ New “tax-escapers” were thus born.

⁴³ Based on the archives of Ba 巴 County in Sichuan, Bradley Reed’s study on county clerks and runners discusses their economic basis during the Qing. See Bradley Reed, *Talons and Teeth, County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). The materials related to these low-rank clerks and scribes in inland Fujian are not enough to compare them to the clerks and runners in Qing Sichuan, but it seems that they shared the same condition to support themselves by various informal incomes.

⁴⁴ *Funing zhoushi* 福寧州志, 7/3b-4b.

Local Impact of Official Documentation

Pre-modern documentation of the state was constrained by limited techniques and the effect of bureaucratization. It would be dangerous to overestimate the precision of written records during the Ming because producing precise information was not the first reason to establish the official documentation system. Nevertheless, maintaining and regularly updating such a huge collection of registration information required high-level skills and meticulous works. In a Zhejiang gazetteer compiled in the mid-sixteenth century, for example, nineteen different kinds of registers, totally 1,311 volumes, stored in the bureau of county government were listed.⁴⁵ Only a relatively small group of people had this ability to produce these documents, or even just investigate their correctness. While local administration heavily relied on written records, literary skills became an important asset in local community, since it could be used to change one's legal status, and legal status was so important in regulating one's duties toward the state, political positions, and even economic life.

For local people, the discrepancy between written records and reality provided leeway for locals to negotiate with the state about their obligations. They tended to do this in collaboration with local scribes. By bribing local scribes, powerful families could change the records of their estates or the number of adult males in official registers. Registered households gradually became nominal accounts of legal status. People who had a registered household account had to pay taxes and take on various state obligations, but

⁴⁵ The County Yellow Register of this county had 340 volumes. See *Jiajing Pujiang zhilue* 嘉靖浦江志略, 3/14b-22a.

they also acquired the status to build the connection with the government. For example, only people with a registered household could participate in civil and military examinations and became degree-holders. From the mid-Ming to the Qing, registered household accounts gradually became something that could be purchased, shared, and exchanged. All one had to do was contact the clerks or scribes who worked on these official records. It became a strategic choice to keep a registered household, to abandon the original household, or to obtain a new registered household.⁴⁶

While powerful families hid estates or adult males from official records, some newly settled families looked to buy a registered household account so that their legal status could be at least protected by local authorities. Because new settlers were usually weaker at the early stage, they sometimes bought a single household account and shared the duty and taxation burden altogether. Those new immigrants who could not or chose not to register in official records might not have to pay taxes or provide various state services, but they would have to take the risk of not being protected by the government while being attacked by original residents or other immigrants. Therefore, it was a strategic choice for new immigrants as well as original residents to register in official records or not. To make the best choices, a family had to consider whether it was worthwhile to carry official burdens in exchange for an official status.

As we see in the quote from a gazetteer in northeastern Fujian, the number of the registered households in this district during the mid-sixteenth century was only one-third of that of the late fourteenth century. Since the population generally increased during this period, there must have been more families choosing to abandon or hide from their

⁴⁶ Liu, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian*, 191-204.

registered households. This is a common phenomenon during the Ming, at least in northeastern Fujian. The gazetteer of Fuzhou Prefecture compiled during the Wanli period quoted a comment in the section of household registration as the conclusion. Even when there was no war in Fuzhou from the mid fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, the registered numbers of household did not increase much, and in the early sixteenth century, the number was totally stagnated. The commentator argued that it was because during the decennial grand compilation the clerks and scribes only needed to make sure the total number of registered household was not lower than the previous edition, and after being bribed by locals, they did not register the actual information. Rich families who were able to bribe were therefore able to hide their increasing family members and property, and the tax burdens fell on poor families that were not able to give a bribe. “Therefore powerful families and clans consist of more than one hundred family members, but county magistrates could not collect one single inch of cloth or conscript one single adult male from them. Farmers’ sons, on the contrary, were registered in official records since very young, and clerks harshly exact capital taxes from them.” The solution that the commentator suggested was to check the registration records before anyone filed a lawsuit. However, his suggestion reveals that it was uncommon to do so.⁴⁷

The result was the gap between the rich and the poor widened. Many poor families could not afford the heavy burdens, so some of them abandoned their original registered households and escaped from their original residence;⁴⁸ some might sell their property, subordinated themselves to powerful families and became their “tenant-households.” Rich

⁴⁷ *Wanli Fuzhou fuzhi*, 256.

⁴⁸ And these “empty household account” became a commodity that others could buy.

families, on the contrary, accumulated lands. The scale of their families expanded on the basis of lineage and these lineage congregations became the dominant powers in local society. This problem might be more serious in marginal regions, where there were more people who could not afford the taxes and did not need the household privileges, such as participating in civil examinations.

The consequence of the stagnation of household registration and hidden households was the decline in financial income of local administrations, which further weakened local infrastructures. In order to fill the financial hole, local administrators collected more taxes and fees for various reasons, and while rich families were better in avoiding these burdens, these extra burdens fell on poor families. Poor families became poorer. Although attributing the financial difficulty and the aggravation of the poor's condition partly to the military expenses against "Japanese pirates" since the mid-Ming, this Fuzhou commentator insisted that this problem stemmed from the dysfunction of the household registration system, the negligence of local officials, and the greed of clerks and local families.⁴⁹

All these operations had to do with the manipulation of official documents, and also the acceptance of these manipulated results by local authorities. This is not to say that official documents were ineffective, or that state power failed to control localities. These official registers, accounts, licenses, and certificates still had their regulative power most of the time, but the process of their fabrication involved different forms of confrontation and negotiation among different parts of society. Rather than the direct presence of state power,

⁴⁹ Ibid.

a local official document would be the result of communication among the state and other parts of society as authorized by the state, and became the basis of local administration.

Since official documents became something that could be manipulated, official status and household registration became something that could be traded. It became common or even necessary for local people to join this game, either to get rid of their official duties or to acquire some advantages from others. These texts became an arena for local people not only to negotiate with the state, but also to negotiate with one another. These negotiations not only shaped local people's relationships with the state, but also influenced how local people organized themselves. In many cases, documents related to these negotiations were either directly copied into family documents at later stages, or integrated into historical narratives which were reinterpreted and recorded by the descendants.

The following sections show two cases of such operations in northern Gutian during the Ming. In these two cases, I stress the manipulation of official documents behind their interaction with the state, and its impact on local documents.

The Boyuan Sus: Competitions and Strategies

The first case is a petition copied in the genealogy of the Su 蘇 of Boyuan 柏源. This petition was written by Su Duo 蘇鐸 in 1462.⁵⁰ He claimed that his family, registered as a commoner household, was framed and wrongly placed into a military household. His family was therefore forced to take the military obligation that they should not have taken.

⁵⁰ *Wugongtang Boyuancun Su-shi jiapu* 武功堂柏源村蘇氏家譜, 15-16.

According to the text, he sent this petition to the Regional Inspector and Troop-Purifying Investigating Censor.

To clarify that their family was registered as a commoner household, this petition began with detailed information of their family's household registration.

Su Duo 蘇鐸, resident of the Second Plat, the Twenty-Third Sector, Gutian County, Fuzhou Prefecture, Provincial Administration Commission of Fujian, respectfully petitions the affair of deceptively claiming a commoner household as a military household, and wrongly combining the household registration.

In the fourth year of the Hongwu reign (1371), my great grandfather Su Wenben 蘇文本 received the household certificate, serial number: *xiang* 象-139,⁵¹ from the Board of Revenue, and was appointed to take up the service of commoner. In the fourteenth year of the Hongwu reign (1381), my great grandfather, Su Wenben registered this household [in the Yellow Register]. My grandfather's brother, Su Pengdi 蘇彭弟 became the chief of this household in the twenty-fourth year of the Hongwu reign (1391). My grandfather, Su Lüchang 蘇呂昌 became the head of this household in the first year of the Yongle reign (1403). In the tenth year of the Yongle reign (1413), my father Su Qiong 蘇瓊, became the head of this household. And we have always held this household as commoners.⁵²

According to the official records, the Hongwu emperor started to distribute “household certificates” in 1370, and the Su family got registered soon in 1371. He could even provide the serial number of their household certificate during the Hongwu reign, which was almost one hundred years earlier. In the following year, the head of the registered household changed several time. The regular ten-year intervals in the Hongwu and the Yongle reigns here marked the years of grand compilation. It means that the grand compilation was properly executed at least in the early Ming, and the Su did follow the

⁵¹ The numbering of their household certificates began with one character, which should be selected from *Thousand Character Classic* (*qianziwen* 千字文), often used as the primer for basic literacy and also the codes for numbering, and three numbers.

⁵² *Wugongtang Boyuancun Su-shi jiapu*, 15.

official regulation to renew their household registration. In this brief description, he did not mention any change from 1413 to 1462. Probably it is because his father Su Qiong was always the head of household during this period of time, hence no change in the record.

According to Su Duo, Su Dongcai 蘇凍才 of the Twentieth Sector was conscripted in 1376 and served under the platoon commander of the imperial insignia guard in Nanjing. His household was therefore turned into a military household, and his family had to take the responsibility of military service, providing an adult male and supporting his traveling and military expenses. In 1459, Su Dongcai's grandson, Su Guang 蘇廣, who inherited Su Dongcai's military obligation in Nanjing, returned to his hometown in the Twentieth Sector for expense subsidy. He sent a petition to the community head, and claimed that his neighbor in the same sector sold his estates when he was away. The community head and the community elder (*laoren* 老人) asked the money back to Su Guang, and then Su Guang returned to his garrison in Nanjing.⁵³

In 1461, Su Guang returned to his hometown again. According to Su Duo's petition, he saw that his family members' lives were so difficult in northern Gutian, but the family of Su Duo was quite wealthy. He therefore asserted that his and Su Duo's family had the same ancestors registered in the same military household, but Su Duo's family escaped from the military obligation and did not provide him the expenses he was entitled to. This time, Su Guang sent the petition directly to the county magistrate and the Fujian Provincial

⁵³ Community heads and community elders play an important role as mediators in local society. Community elders were the venerable people selected by local officials to negotiate local disputes. Both could also be the guarantor for people in their communities. We see many in this case, although I do not plan to discuss it. For the role of community heads in local mediations, see Nakajima Gakushō's study, which was based on the local documents in Huizhou. See Nakajima Gakushō 中島楽章, *Mindai gōson no funsō to chitsujo: Kishū monjo o shiryō to shite* 明代郷村の紛争と秩序: 徽州文書を史料として (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2002).

Surveillance Commissioner Concurrently in Charge of Troop Purification. The county magistrate gathered the community head, the community elder, and other neighbors. He investigated the records thoroughly. After the community head guaranteed the authenticity of the records twice, the case was then closed and reported upward. However, Su Guang, who did not gain any reward, was not willing to return to the guard. Later in the same year, Su Guang sent the petition again and this time the Fujian provincial surveillance commissioner concurrently in charge of troop purification accepted his petition. The commissioner ordered the county magistrate to put Su Duo's father, the community head, and community elder into custody. These people were sent to the prefectural capital and interrogated by the commissioner.

In the interrogation, Su Duo's father claimed that although they had the same surname, they lived in different sectors and were registered in different households. He also asked the official to check the registers in provincial capital, if he did not trust the records at the county level. However, the commissioner did not believe his words at all. He pejoratively called Su Duo's father "Old barbarian," wanted him to take the military obligation, and kept them in custody. Su Duo's father soon realized that the commissioner was waiting for bribery. Because their family was just robbed by bandits and did not have any cash, he asked his son to return to Boyuan and sell their estates. However, because their village was deep in mountains, his son, Su Duo, could not find a buyer immediately. The commissioner, without getting any bribe from Su Duo's family, lost his patience. He started to torture Su Duo's father and all the others, including the community head and the community elder. Eventually, Su Duo's father was tortured to death. The rest of them could not cope with tortures anymore, and signed the draft that the commissioner proposed to

admit that they had the same ancestor with Su Guang and shared the same military household. After declaring their crimes and punishment by caning, the commissioner released Su Duo, the community head and others. Su Duo's household registration was thereby combined with that of Su Guan, and had to start providing the military service.

The burden of military service was heavy. The household had to provide one adult male and also support his traveling and military expenses. If he was assigned to a garrison very far away, which usually happened, his family's burden would be even more unbearable. Because the household was hereditary, this was an everlasting burden to a family registered as military household. In the petition, Su Guang claimed his relatives became very poor because of these burdens. This might be the excuse that Su Guang used to justify his accusation. Being categorized as a military household would also be a serious attack to Su Duo's family and their descendants: his father would rather be tortured to death than accepting the commissioner's arrangement. After being released, Su Duo continued to petition to higher officials: Regional Inspector and Toop-Purifying Investigating Censor. In this petition, he implored the officials to contact the Board of Revenue in Nanjing to check the registers of commoner and military households from the Hongwu period. "If we are truly related to Su Dongcai, we are more than willing to go to the army. If we were registered as commoner households, however, I implore you to contact the Fujian Provincial Administrative Commission and have the county magistrate correct our registration records."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Wugongtang Boyuancun Su-shi jiapu*, 15.

With only one document surviving, we do not know whether Su Duo was successful in his appeal.⁵⁵ With only Su Duo's statement, we cannot be sure whether his words were true or not. However, this case shows how much household registration mattered to local families. The fate of a family and its descendants could be greatly influenced by it. Moreover, this case also illustrates the problem of official documentation in less than one hundred years after it was institutionalized. If the official documentation system functioned well, this case would not have happened. Su Guang's accusation was accepted because the gap between written records and actual situations at the local level was widely recognized. If the records at the lowest level were not reliable and even the guarantee from the community head was not trusted, officials should be able to go back to the registration records at the county level, or even the provincial level. However, Su Guang probably bribed the clerks and officials, so the commissioner did not agree to check the records stored in the provincial capital. The last hope for Su Duo's family was to implore high officials to go back to the registration record that was sent to Nanjiang during the Hongwu period when the first registration was done.

The institutional dysfunction of official documentation provided local families an opportunity to change their current status. Su Guang's repeated petitions at different levels, at least three times in this text, implied that he knew the system well, and people like him with such skills and knowledge could take advantage to either lessen their official burden, or make some profit. It is also possible that the unnamed agents, litigation masters, were behind the disputes. They were the professionals who manipulated documents and created

⁵⁵ According to a note, the commissioner stopped Su Duo before he went to Nanjing and recovered their commoner household record. However, the date of this note is unknown. See *Wugongtang Su-shi zhipu* 武功堂蘇氏支譜, 40.

legal documents for local families. These litigation masters were particularly hated by local officials. An announcement written by a county magistrate of Gutian to the local families in the Twentieth-Third Sector, where Su Duo's family lived, seriously attacked litigation masters: "You [the people in the Twenty-Third Ward] should know those litigation masters cause disaster to people's family and property. They take all the advantages and who would take the disadvantages? They cause all the trouble and who would suffer the consequences of these troubles? Initially, it was because you intend to share more food and clothes so you all gathered like a nest of birds. And now it turns out that you attempt to fight with each other with spears and knives like breeding tigers in your house. What would be so crafty that it could escape from our imperial jurisdiction? How could an extremely canny arrangement become extremely stupid?"⁵⁶ Although this announcement was written much later in the early seventeenth century, it represents the general attitude toward litigation masters from the perspective of local officials. The county magistrate's comment on litigation masters inciting family feuds was similar to the case between two Su families.

Su Duo's petition, successful or not, was copied verbally and included in the genealogies of the Su family. When the Boyuan Sus started to compile their genealogy again in the 80s, they copied this text in a genealogy compiled in 1911.⁵⁷ Since it is the oldest text about their family history, this petition is always placed in the first several pages of their genealogies.

⁵⁶ Yang Dezhou, "Xiaoyu san-shi-er du gaowen," *Yutian shilue* 8/4a.

⁵⁷ *Wugongtang Boyuancun Su-shi jiapu*, 16. Also see the draft of newly-edited *Wugongtang Boyuancun Su-shi jiapu*, 15.

The Fenglin Yangs: Formation of Family Histories

The second case is a short historical narrative recorded in the genealogy of the Yang 楊 family in Fenglin 鳳林 village. This story is recorded in the section of family history as the biography of Yang Yili. While the Boyuan Sus verbally copied the original document into their genealogies, the Fenglin Yangs made a historical narrative about dealing with a similar issue of military obligation.

As many historical narratives in this area, the story began at the early Ming. Their ancestor, Yang Yili 楊以禮 was conscripted by the government during the Hongwu period, and was assigned to transport official registers to Nanjing. He knew this journey could be dangerous, and told his young wife, Mrs. Yang née Lü to take care of their three children no matter what happened. Unfortunately, his boat sank in the Lake of Poyang 鄱陽 and he died on the halfway point to his journey. Even though their family was poor, his wife raised their three children under extremely tough conditions, and after she passed away, her descendants bought sacrificial fields to support the ritual of worship to her.

In 1525, more than one hundred years after the death of Yang Yili, a very harsh deputy county magistrate strictly administered the military affairs with severe punishment. He “took what did not happen as what did happen; took what is false as what is true,” and insisted on conscripting adult males from them to Nanjing. Under the threat of penalty on the whole Sector, they decided to sell their corporate property for more than eighty taels, and used this fund to hire two men from their Sector to fulfill the military obligation.

Because their corporate property was sold, the ritual of worship to Mrs. Yang née Lü was interrupted. Several years later, one of her descendants, Yang Zhiyu 楊志昱 (b. 1509), who was six generations from Yang Yili according to the genealogical line, donated the

annual rents of one of his fields to continue the ritual. To make this arrangement last, the son of Yang Zhiyu, Yang Shirong 楊仕榮 (1542-1621) later persuaded other two branches in another village to buy a field together, and with the rents from this field, each branch held the annual ritual of worship to Mrs. Yang née Lü in turn. This ritual, however, was interrupted again at some unknown time. It was during the Qianlong period, another two centuries after Yang Zhiyu's arrangement, when the descendants of Yang Yili decided to add an additional ritual toward Mrs. Yang née Lü after the performance of the ritual of worship toward their ancestor, which was supposed to be one of her three sons.⁵⁸ On the one hand, this story seems to be quite common on the surface as a story to honor their ancestors' mother and perform a ritual for her; on the other hand, this story is taken very seriously in their genealogy, and it does relate to several important topics for local families, such as state duties and lineage organization.

As mentioned earlier, the duty of a military household was very heavy. To avoid such a burden, people resorted to several. In the case of Su family, it could be that Su Guang attempted to lessen the burden by accusing someone else and acquiring compensation, or it could be Su Duo's family bribed the clerk to make them separated from the household of Su Dongcai. Another situation to avoid military obligations was to be classified as "terminated" (*jue* 絕). When all the adult males registered in a military household had passed away and no one could continue the position as a soldier, military officials would try to conscript their living brothers or even cousins. If they had children, the children's names would be recorded and they would be conscripted when they became adults. Only

⁵⁸ *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu* 鳳林楊氏族譜, 42-43.

when truly no one could be conscripted from this household would this household be classified as a terminated military household and its military obligation would be dissolved. It seems quite difficult to be classified as terminated, since all the male relatives had to die. However, terminated military households were not rare. In a *Register of Living and Terminated Military Household* found in Xiuning 修寧 of Huizhou 徽州, a place famous for its merchants all over the empire, twenty-four of the thirty-six military households in a Sector were terminated.⁵⁹

For families with some resources, this could be one of the methods to get rid of military obligation. Rich families could bribe the clerks and change the records until there was no adult male registered in a household. If all the adult males were removed from the records and no one could be drafted, this military household could be designated as “terminated” from military obligations. However, it had to take the risk of being discovered by military officials. Since it was quite often for local people to escape from military obligations, in order to draft enough soldiers to fulfill the recorded number, military officials could be very cruel.

This might be the situation that the Yang family encountered in 1525. Their story claims that the official took falsified records and wanted to conscript adult males to Nanjing to fill a position of a “terminated military [household]” (*juejun* 絕軍). Of course, no one would say that his ancestor faked a document in their genealogy. However, although there is no further text to prove, it is very possible that this official that they

⁵⁹ Peng Hua 彭華, “Cong liang fen dang’an kan Mingdai de junhu 從兩份檔案看明代的軍戶,” in *Mingshi yanjiu luncong* 明史研究論叢第五輯 vol. 5 (Shanghai: Jiangsu guji, 1991), 86-104.

described as “abusive” and “ruthless” found the authentic records and asked the Yangs to fulfill their registered obligation.

Although, as many families in Fujian did, the Yangs claimed their ancestor moved from Gushi 固始, Henan 河南, to current location, we only have clear biographic information on Yang Yili’s father, including the date of his birth in late Yuan and death in the early Ming dynasty. This information should come from the earliest official registration records that they kept, which was collected during the Hongwu period, when the first emperor of the Ming dynasty institutionalized the official documentation system. It is also very possible that the Yangs was conscripted and categorized as a military household during this registration. Fujian was notorious for many families being conscripted and categorized as military households during the early Ming to the extent it was claimed that one of every three households was conscripted in Fujian.⁶⁰ In order to defend the threat that still existed from the north, in the ninth year of Hongwu (1376), many families in Fujian were conscripted, and most of them were assigned to the garrisons around Nanjing.⁶¹ The Yangs was possibly one of them.

It could be a coincidence that in this short narrative their ancestor Yang Yili passed away on his way to Nanjing and more than one hundred years later, the official also wanted to conscript their adult to a garrison in Nanjing, but it could be that these two incidents in the same narrative were not unrelated. Although this much later narrative claims Yang Yili was drafted to transport official registers to Nanjing, it could be used to cover the fact that their family was conscripted and categorized as a military household during the Hongwu

⁶⁰ He, *Minshu*, 958.

⁶¹ Yu, “Zailun duoji yu chouji”, 197-237, especially 201-202.

reign.⁶² Moreover, the most important incident, the death of Yang Yili, could also be used as a reason to terminate their military obligation, since the only adult male was dead, survived by only one woman.

It seems that the Yang family used some trick to get rid of their military duty at some point during this more than one hundred years and possibly make their original military household “terminated.” However, the military official found out this fact in 1525, and asked them to fulfil their duty. The Yang family now consisted of more than a single family with a widow and three kids. In this narrative the members had to get together to discuss the solution and later we know that at least three branches were united to perform the ritual together. From the fact that the military official required two adults for the army from them, we know that this huge family might probably share two registered households together, no matter how many branches they had.

Since the family had grown into a large group, it became very difficult to decide which members should take this responsibility. Instead of selecting two members within their group, they decided to raise a public fund and hired two people from their own sector to provide this military service. This is another way for a family with some resources to get rid of military obligation: hiring someone else to take it. The Yangs’ decision followed the trend of monetization throughout the Ming. Many obligations and services were gradually monetized with the rise of market economy, and later the influx of silver from the New

⁶² In order to justify their ancestors’ activities, it is not unusual to alter some details in this kind of historical narratives of family history. In another case that I will discuss later, the story recorded in the genealogy of the Gan family in Jixia claims their ancestor, an official collector of mining taxes in southern Zhejiang, was robbed while transporting the taxes. Unable to cover the loss, he led all his lineage members to move to a village in northern Gutian. However, judging by the historical contexts, it is almost impossible for them to be a collector of “mining taxes.” They should be one of the migrant mining workers, who the government called “miner-bandits.” Many of them moved from southern Zhejiang to northeastern Fujian during the mid-Ming, the same period mentioned in the story.

World. People paid to fulfill their duties, such as corvée labor, civil and even military services. Although the famous “single-whip” method, which turned all the corvée labors and services into currency so that registered households only had to pay the money, had not formally become a universal state policy,⁶³ the practices of monetization had been started. Moreover, even though sending two people not registered in the households was apparently against the regulations of military conscriptions and also against written records, military officials, who only aimed to reach the numbers of registration records, apparently accepted this arrangement. It is because the government also compromised so that they could hire someone else to take their registered service.

In addition to the death of Yang Yili, another unusual part in this narrative is the worship of Mrs. Yang née Lü. It is not usual to single out a female ancestor and arrange a particular ceremonial section for her. In the whole genealogy, no other arrangement of ritual was mentioned before that of Mrs. Yang née Lü, not even for her husband, who is supposed to be the ancestor of all. Not even the location of his grave is on the records. Actually, except for hers, the first time that any arrangement related to ancestral worship mentioned in the whole genealogy was in the generation of Yang Shirong’s grandson, Yang Yingfeng 楊應鳳(1577-1670).

Yang Yingfeng was wealthy enough to move to the county seat and donated to build the city wall after local disturbances. Because of his contribution, his name was listed on

⁶³ Liang, Fang-chung, *The Single-Whip Method of Taxation in China*, translated by Wang Yu-ch'uan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

the local gazetteer.⁶⁴ As an active, public figure in the county seat, Yang Yingfeng followed the gentry's norms to honor his ancestors. He compiled the register of ancestral graves and rebuilt several ancestral graves.⁶⁵ According to the biographic entries of many of his ancestors, their graves were built or rebuilt during the 1630s, and the biographic entry of his father, Yang Shirong, also mentioned the arrangement of his ritual of worship and sacrificial fields, which did not appear in any entry before except for that of Mrs. Yang née Lü.⁶⁶ These records suggest that it was during Yang Yingfeng's period in the late Ming that they started to establish a formalized ritual of ancestral worship. The initial version of their family history could also be built during this period. As the grandson of Yang Zhiyü and the son of Yang Shirong, the roles of these two in their family history and the formation of lineage organization were particularly emphasized: Yang Zhiyü's donation to "revive" the ritual to Mrs. Yang and Yang Shirong's effort to unite other two branches and establish the sacrificial fields to Mrs. Yang.

Furthermore, it is quite impossible for the Yang family to arrange Mrs. Yang née Lü's ceremony and bought sacrificial fields for her right after her death in the early Ming. At that time, as a family in northern Gutian, they did not even have a formalized ritual for male ancestors. The story that her ceremony was interrupted because family members sold her sacrificial fields for fulfilling the military obligation and Yang Yingfeng's grandfather donated his own field later could be a reinterpretation generated much later. We should not

⁶⁴ A funeral eulogy to his descendant celebrated his several achievements, including building the city walls, building an academy, getting an official degree and being appointed as an assistant magistrate. However, the last three can not be verified by official records. See *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu*, 152.

⁶⁵ *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu*, 145; *Qianlong Gutian xianzhi*, 7/18a.

⁶⁶ *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu*, 80.

ignore the fact that there were several hundred years between the assumed incidents and their first appearances in text. In the beginning, the fields were said to be donated by Yang Yingfeng's grandfather some years after the conscription in 1525, and the fields were said to be bought together by three branches after the efforts of Yang Yingfeng's father. They might be the public fund used to provide so-called *junzhung* 軍裝, traveling and military expenses, for the soldiers they hired to fulfill the registered military obligations, and they were raised after the 1525 conscription. Since it was the household that all the descendants inherited, the obligation should also be equally shared by all of them. Moreover, in addition to the initial fees of hiring, to sustain a hereditary military expense, nothing would be better than the rents from corporate property. This also explains why the "ritual for the widow mother" was interrupted and no longer performed before the Qianlong reign, since there was no need to provide these Ming military expenses during the Qing.

This narrative discloses some aspects of the negotiation between the state and local families on the fulfillment of state duties, but why (and when) this story was recorded and recorded in this way is also an important question. The Yang family's genealogy we have now is a new compilation printed in 2004, but this particular narrative was noted as "according to the old genealogy." Although we do not have much information about previous genealogies, the narrator in this short passage said that during the Qianlong period, "his uncle and other relatives" met to discuss the ritual for their ancestor, Yang Liangsong 楊良聳, which was supposed to be one of the three sons that Mrs. Yang née Lü brought up, and in this discussion, they decided to have a special worship to Mrs. Yang.⁶⁷ It is fair to

⁶⁷ *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu*, 42.

say that the version of the Yangs' early history and this legendary widow was formally written to support the special worship of Mrs. Yang during the Qianlong reign. Possibly it was the first time that this story became a coherent statement in writing.

Actually, during the Qianlong period, there was a wave to establish a formal ritual of ancestral worship in Fenglin. It was the period when the new Pingnan County was established and a new quota of civil degrees was provided particularly for those whose households were registered in northern Gutian, which then became Pingnan County. Many who lived in or nearby the county seat chose to come back to their northern households, and took civil examinations in this less competitive new county. The Yang family was one of them. The great-great grandson of Yang Yingfeng moved back to Fenglin as Pingnan County was established and became one of the first government students in Pingnan. Their family contributed much to the establishment of several official bureaus and academies in the Pingnan county seat and became the new gentry of this new county.⁶⁸ It was during this period that the Yang family started to rebuild a formalized ritual in Fenglin, compiled a genealogy (probably the source of the "old genealogy" mentioned in the 2004 edition) and re-articulate their family history: no longer a family avoiding their state duty on the margin of empire, but a virtuous widow who brought up three sons, the ancestors of their three branches.

Certainly, such a great women with such a great contribution to their family needed a particular ritual of worship, and her story needed to be recorded in the genealogy.

⁶⁸ *Fenglin Yang-shi zupu*, 147-148, 152-153.

Conclusion

Before regional markets and printed books, a political regime was often regarded as an important agent of literacy in the pre-modern period. Michael Clanchy's classic study of medieval literacy in England, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, saw the Norman Conquest, the Domesday survey, and the domination of a centralized royal bureaucracy as a crucial turning point. Not only were different types of official records proliferated in the court, but also writs, charters, certificates, and various documents reached to villages, spreading laity literacy. A "literate mentality" was shared by various social groups, and written documents were practically used in different spheres of social life.⁶⁹

Similarly, Richard Rubinger's study on popular literacy in early modern Japan, places the shift in the late sixteenth century, when village leaders were granted more rights in local administration. Starting from the early seventeenth century, a high level of functional literacy was developing among village headmen, who collected taxes, kept records, administrated village affairs, and communicated with officials. In the eighteenth century, these village headmen learnt from the flourishing culture in cities by their literary skill, and became provincial literati.⁷⁰ In both studies the basic argument is that administrative purposes of a political regime brought written documents to villages and initiated practical literacy among people in a lower social hierarchy and in wider geographical distribution.

⁶⁹ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London : Edward Arnold, 1979).

⁷⁰ Richard Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan*, particularly the first three chapters.

In late imperial China, the influence of the state power on the spread of written documents and the mode of governance by text was crucial. This trend, which did not start from the Ming, was accelerated by the expansion of *lijia*, a self-monitoring administrative system by which local leaders managed records and documents, and its integration with household registration. The universal registration connected people to the state and decided their obligation to the government. Following the expansion of the *lijia* system, many marginal communities were also included in this “regime of documents.” The practice of registration and its official documents created a conceptual framework among these communities. Concepts, such as the spatial division of community and tithing, or hereditary property ownership attached to a fixed household unit, were broadly followed by local people and adopted in non-official documents, such as contracts, genealogies, family accounts, and even ritual texts used to communicate with supernatural world. This mode of “administration by documents” became widely shared between both the ruling officials and those being ruled. The penetration of “literate mentality” created by the official installment of registration and bureaucratic system cannot be ignored even in discussing non-official documents and communications, which will be further illustrated in following chapters.

However, it is clear that universal registration systems and the reach of official documents had their limits. The early Ming ideal initiated by the Hongwu emperor, although successful in certain areas, did not last long. For example, in northeastern Fujian, encouraged by flourishing economic activities and population pressure, immigrants in inland Fujian and elsewhere in southern China sought new land and opportunities. Their movement was not constrained by jurisdictional boundaries, and neither the limited

administrative capacity of local authorities nor their official documents could contain them. The idealized design of institutions does not always match the changing reality. The early Ming system of registration and *lijia* might be better suited in a society recovering from a period of disturbance, but apparently not to a society in change.

If we simply follow the statements from official materials, it is easy to evaluate the reception of official documents but it would be restricted to the view of government. The significant finding from local materials is that villagers did not passively receive official documents and the rule of local government. Different strategies were developed to deal with official rules by manipulating written materials, and because of it, literary skills and a literate stratum became important. In marginal regions such as northern Gutian and many counties in northeastern Fujian, official documents were usually dominated by a group of professionals who were the mediators between the written world and reality as well as local people and government. Litigation masters were another group that became the agents between people and official powers. It was through them that a series of negotiation could be made behind the documents.⁷¹

However, it should be noted that being manipulated does not necessarily mean official documents lost their authority. On the contrary, manipulating them in fact to some extent endorsed their effectiveness; otherwise it would be unnecessary to forge an ineffective document. It could be said that only when the basic framework created by official documents was followed would manipulating a document be meaningful. Ineffectiveness was only applied to those who did not play the game at the very

⁷¹ Melissa Macauley, *Social Power and Legal Culture: Litigation Masters in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

beginning--those unregistered residents and immigrants who never put themselves into the official bureaucratic system.

Highlighting the use of official documents in these marginal villages and counties questions the relationship between the state and society from a microscopic view. If we simplify the idea of “being ruled” as following the instructions from local authorities, fulfilling the obligations of paying taxes, providing labor service, and being conscripted into the army, how these instructions and obligations were operated should be an essential question. These cases show that mediators played an important role, and non-official parties actually had large room to redistribute the obligations to the state. Several actors participated in the process of negotiation, and literary skills were certainly one of the keys. Local people developed different strategies to deal with their relationships with the state, especially those rich and powerful families, who were able to acquire more cultural sources. They either manipulated these texts by themselves, or hired professionals to do it for them. Many official categories, recorded by documents, became something that could be transferred and altered, so did the related privileges and duties. Therefore, through this mechanism, powerful families could perpetuate their dominant status and newly rising families could expand their spheres of influences.

Moreover, these negotiations by documents not only decided the relationships between the state and local families, but also influenced how local communities shaped themselves. Many contents and forms in official documents were either copied into non-official documents, or used as the framework for them. These negotiations and arrangements also came into the historical narratives of local families. For example, since many families in northern Gutian did not have many materials left at the early stage, the

negotiations of military obligation between the state and the Fenglin Yangs became the theme of their early family history. Its influence was not limited to the Ming as it also continued to the Qing.

While in this chapter I focused on the establishment of official documentation system and its impact on local families during the Ming, in the next chapter I turn to the perspective of local families, using the materials from a particular family to see how local people used textual materials to promote their social status in a competitive environment during the Ming.

Chapter 3

Textualizing the Elites: Social Mobility and Genealogy Compilation

The model that the Ming government pursued was a homogenous society managed by a regulated administrative system. However, neither a homogenous society nor a regulated administrative system was realized. Our stage, Northern Gutian during the Ming period, was never a homogenous society. People were categorized by their official household registration: registered early residents with commoner status; registered early residents with military status; unregistered immigrants; and soldiers appointed to Gutian to cultivate military fields. Many people either took advantage of their legal status for better development or attempted to discharge their state duties and restrictions. People were also divided by their economic status. The rich tended to accumulate more wealth; the poor also tried to improve their lives. Sometimes, these two statuses influenced one another. It is easier for rich families to change their legal status, and poor families suffered the most disadvantages from their legal status.

In addition to these two statuses, a third status was promoted through cultural capital, and the accumulation of this capital was usually related to the production of texts. Although Northern Gutian was a competitive environment during the Ming era, not all local families had to promote their cultural status by making texts. However, this promotion was necessary for the families who wanted to join the network of local elites and form a better connection with political authority.

This chapter is based on the textual materials found in Ruiyun 瑞雲 village. The genealogy of the Yao 姚 family of Ruiyun is the most complicated and ambitious textual compilation in northern Gutian throughout the Ming period.¹ Most of this genealogy was compiled from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries. This genealogy perfectly illustrates the efforts of a rising family and the different aspects of genealogy compilation. Although most Ming documents in northern Gutian were lost, this precious material of the late Ming period provides a rare glimpse in the local literary activities before the destructive Ming-Qing transition in this region.

A Family Tutor's Dream

Yang Zhiyuan 楊志遠 had a dream. He was the tutor of the Yao family of Ruiyun 瑞雲 since the 1570s. In approximately 1585, he began to compile the genealogy of the Yaos, “the first family history in three hundred years.” After completing the genealogy in 1626, he travelled to the lower Yangzi delta, “gathering books in quantity” and returned to Ruiyun in 1632. When he returned to Ruiyun and stayed in a building of the Yao family, he had a dream.²

¹ This genealogy was kept by a family member of the Ruiyun Yaos, who lives in the county seat of Pingnan now. A photocopy of this genealogy is preserved in the Provincial Library of Fujian. This copy was made during the compilation of *Fuzhou xingshi zhi* 福州姓氏志 (The Gazetteer of Surnames in Fuzhou) in early 2000. After the compilation of this gazetteer, the copy went to the Provincial Library. The version I use in the dissertation is from the pictures of the genealogy kept by the family member in Pingnan, which I took in 2011.

² “Preface,” by Yang Zhiyuan, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu* 瑞雲姚氏族譜, 119-120. Yang Zhiyuan's age and the years he served in the Yao family was inferred from the preface and other comments in this genealogy. Also see his comment to “The Account of Literary Writings,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 113.

An old man with silver hair declaring to be “the Master of Ruiyun³” approached him. The old man praised Yang Zhiyuan for his meticulous compilation of the genealogy of his family branch. However, the old man claimed that “the origin of the Yaos has not been thoroughly traced, the current outstanding young members have not been entirely recorded, and the glorious places of Ruiyun have not been fully illustrated.” Therefore, the old man wanted Yang to use his “craft of manipulating a huge pen” (the literal expression used to designate “the skill of literary writing”) and urged him to revise the current genealogy that he had compiled. Waking up, Yang Zhiyuan realized that this mysterious old man was Yao Zirong 姚子容 (b. 1354), the most respected ancestor in Yao’s family history. At approximately seventy years old at the time, Yang Zhiyuan began to compile an enlarged second edition.⁴

Yang Zhiyuan’s dream was narrated in the preface he wrote to this revised genealogy. It was not unusual for a writer to narrate a dream in the preface to explain the motive of his writing. However, the reason Yang Zhiyuan recorded this dream was obviously to provide the legitimacy for his revision of an original genealogy through an invitation from the most respected ancestor. In addition to the supposedly conventional rule of genealogy revision at thirty-year intervals, this particular narration showed that Yang Zhiyuan felt the necessity to justify this revision. Through the words of the old man in the dream, the author implied three motives: to better trace the ancestral origin, to promote the reputation of lineage members and to form an identity attached to a specific location. These motives were related

³ The term he actually used was “the Master of Tianma 天馬之主人.” Tianma was the literary name of Ruiyun used only in literary writings. To keep the consistency, I changed all Tianma to Ruiyun in this dissertation.

⁴ “Preface” by Yang Zhiyuan, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 120.

to the historical change of this community during the late Ming period. All of these motives were believed to be achievable by articulating written texts.

Compared with many much simpler genealogies in this region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this genealogy is complicated and sophisticated. This genealogy shows the height of genealogy compilation during the late Ming era and the caliber of an experienced compiler. This genealogy comprises three major parts. The third part, which is the main text for the Ruiyun Yaos, has ten chapters (chart 3). Each chapter is an “account” regarding different aspects of their family history, and each account has its particular function to the whole narrative. The present chapter is based on the close reading of each chapter and account of the genealogy and explores its significance in this grand plan of compilation.

Chart 3 The structure of the Genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos

| |
|---|
| Prefaces 序 |
| I. The First Genealogy of the Yaos, the Branch of Wuyuan 姚氏第一譜婺源支牒 |
| The Record of Heavenly Grace Granted to the Wuyuan Yaos 婺源姚氏世恩錄 |
| II. The Second Genealogy of the Yaos, the Branch of Dongshu and Xixiang, Ningde 姚氏第二譜寧德東蜀西鄉支 |
| Prefaces to the Old Ningde Genealogy 寧德舊譜序 |
| The Record of Heavenly Grace Granted to the Ningde Yaos 寧德姚氏世恩錄 |
| III. The Third Genealogy of the Yaos, the Branch of Ruiyun, Yutian 姚氏第三譜玉田瑞雲支牒 |
| i. The Account of Origin 瑞雲世本紀 |
| ii. The Account of Resident 瑞雲世居紀 |
| iii. The Account of Landscape 瑞雲詠勝紀 |
| iv. The Account of Military Service 瑞雲世伍紀 |
| v. The Account of Household Registration 瑞雲世籍紀 |
| vi. The Account of Descent Line 瑞雲世系紀 |
| vii. The Account of Biography 瑞雲世牒紀 |
| viii. The Account of Grave 瑞雲世兆紀 |
| ix. The Account of Family Admonition 瑞雲世訓敷言紀 |
| x. The Account of Literary Writing [瑞雲]世徵藝綸紀 |

History: Inventing the Origin

Instead of a dream, the direct cause of this revision was the acquisition of another genealogy from a distant location. In 1627, Yao Shiluan 姚士鑾 (b. 1594), a young member of the Yao family, travelled to Jiangnan and acquired a genealogy from the Yao family of Wuyuan 婺源 in southern Huizhou 徽州. This location was famous for being the

hometown of the prominent Neo-Confucian philosopher, Zhu Xi. The acquisition was considered an important event, recorded and acclaimed in the brief biographical entry of Yao Shiluan. Accepting this material as evidence of their ancestral origin, the Yao family asked Yang Zhiyuan to include this genealogy in their own, placing it at the very beginning.⁵

This request of integrating new material caused Yang Zhiyuan to fundamentally change the structure of the genealogy.⁶ A cautious compiler, Yang “dare not just follow [the Wuyuan genealogy] and dare not delete it.”⁷ He selected a number of names of officials and high degree holders from the Wuyuan genealogy and made a list, titled “the Record of the [Heavenly] Grace Granted to the Wuyuan Yaos.” This account was considered “the First Genealogy 第一譜,” and following it, another list from *The Old Ningde Genealogy* 寧德舊譜 was considered “the Second Genealogy 第二譜.” His own composition, the genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos, contained ten volumes and was humbly placed after the first and second genealogies and called “The Third Genealogy 第三譜.”⁸ Although the first two were disproportionately short, Yang Zhiyuan intentionally used this three-part structure to present the hierarchy of ancestral origins. He presented these origins

⁵ An anonymously hand-written note right after Yang Zhiyuan’s preface claimed that Yang had come back to Yao’s place in 1627, but their project of revision was interrupted by some local disturbance. Only after 1632 when the situation calmed down that Yang Zhiyuan and the Yao could discuss the genealogy revision. This note implied that before “the dream” in 1632, the Yao family had had the plan to revise the genealogy and also explained why Yang did not start to revise the Ruiyun genealogy right after receiving the genealogy from Wuyuan.

⁶ In another preface written by a close friend, Zhang Shaozai 張紹載, in 1613, the author briefly mentioned the titles of each volumes but did not include the first two “parts” in current edition. It implied that Yang Zhiyuan had not yet adopted the three-part structure when Zhang Shaozai read the genealogy in 1613. See “Preface” by Zhang Shaozai, in *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 118-119.

⁷ Introduction to “The First Genealogy” by Yang Zhiyuan, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 121.

⁸ His explanation of this arrangement, see “Preface” by Yang Zhiyuan, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 119.

from Wuyuan, geographically remote from Pingnan but culturally central to the empire, to nearby Ningde, which already had a written record, then finally to their own location.

Yang's cautious attitude toward the Wuyuan genealogy and the way he dealt with it – he did not even attempt to connect the Ruiyun Yao descent to this distant text – might result from the fact that these two genealogies did not correspond well. Beginning with the founding ancestor of Wuyuan to the last, a metropolitan graduate of the Southern Song dynasty, the list did not provide any clue that could be used to connect the Ruiyun Yaos. However, it was important for the lineage members and the genealogy compiler to make the Wuyuan genealogy “the first” because this outside document was connected to the core of empire. By placing a long list of officials' and degree-holders' names from another genealogy at the beginning of their own, Yang obviously attempted to connect the Yaos in remote mountains to a reputed lineage. This lineage – though its reputation was also possibly fabricated – supposedly could be traced to Yao Cong 姚崇 (650-721), a famous minister during the Tang dynasty. This intention was clearly shown in the ending comment of this part by Yang Zhiyuan. “The Wuyuan Yaos are the direct descent of Yao Cong. How great that they keep holding official titles and degrees for generations and generations without interruption. The Ningde Yaos also came from a minor branch of Yao Cong. In the fourteenth generation since migrating to Fujian, some of them went to Gutian. This fact is particularly presented here to illustrate the origin [of our own family].”⁹ This comment demonstrated a popular tendency in genealogy compilation: to trace the origin to a historical figure related to the geographical and cultural center of the state.

⁹ “The First Genealogy of the Yao, the Branch of Wuyuan,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 8.

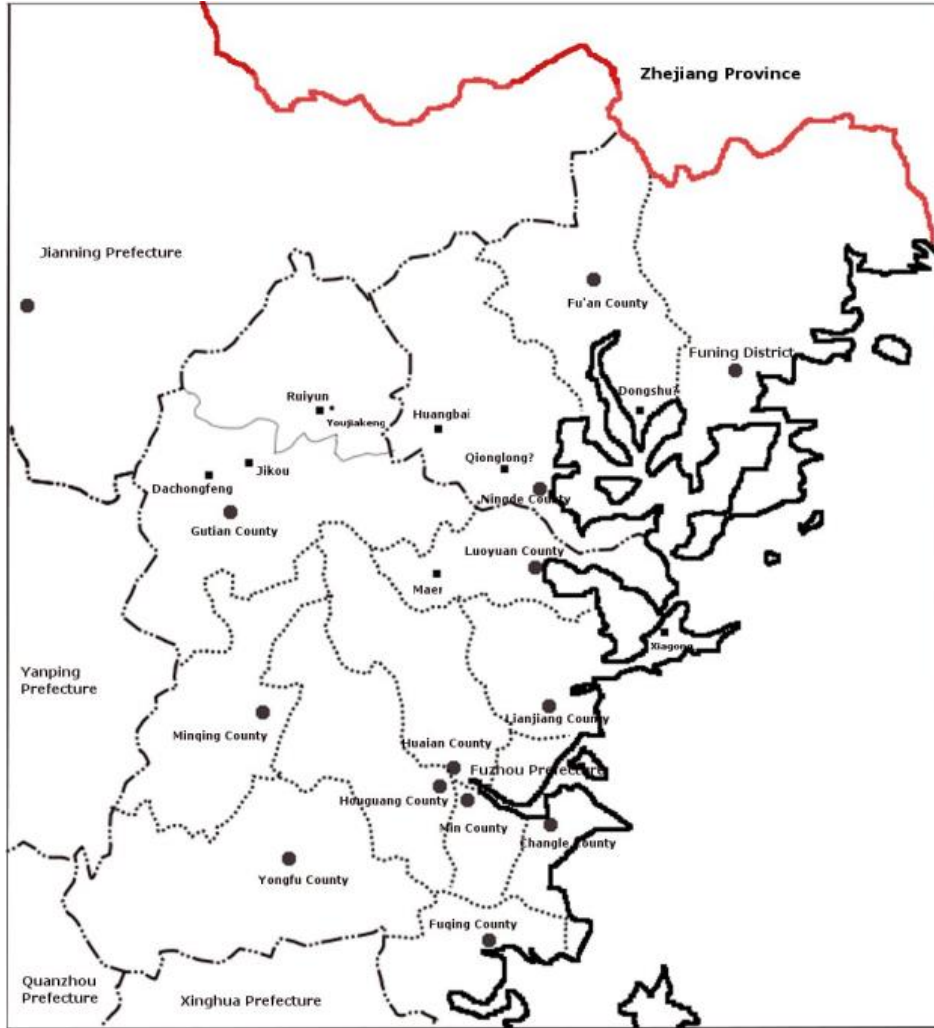
Although the Wuyuan genealogy from distant Huizhou might be important in its symbolic significance, the Second Genealogy from neighboring Ningde provided a story of ancestral origin. This part began with a full text of “the preface of the Old Ningde Genealogy” from the Song dynasty, though the details it provided suggested that this preface could not have been composed before the Ming era.¹⁰ The editor also claimed that there were still another three missing prefaces during the Song dynasty among which one was dated during the Xining period (1068-1077) and the other in 1181. All these prefaces, authentic or fabricated, were trying to convince the readers of the credibility of its content and its long history. After the preface was the main content, “the Record of the [Heavenly] Grace Granted to the Ningde Yaos” of which the structure was similar to Wuyuan’s structure. Some smaller characters under the title noted that these contents “were all copied from the Ningde genealogy.”¹¹

The preface and the account of the Second Genealogy provided a clearer version of the historical migration of the Yaos. During the period of Five Dynasties, Yao Tingyi 姚廷義 (901-983), the vice salt and iron monopoly commissioner, moved from Zhejiang to Fujian in the year 927 and settled in Dongshu 東蜀 of Ningde (Map 5). Considering the political disturbances of this period, Yao Tingyi declined the position that the King of the Min Kingdom offered him and devoted himself to Buddhism, donating to several Buddhist temples and travelling. Later, his elder son once travelled to Qionglong 穹隆 and moved there for its wonderful landscape. In the banquet held before the household divided, the

¹⁰ For example, in the preface Fuzhou was called “the provincial capital of Fujian.” However, there was no “province” during the Song dynasties, and no “Fujian Province” until the Ming.

¹¹ “The Second Genealogy of the Yao, the Branch of Dongshu and Xixiang, Ningde,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 9.

two sons of Yao Tingyi, afraid that their descendants would forget their origins, composed two “Books of the Family.” These books clearly recorded their family history, and the two sons ordered their descendants to “hide them in the family temple as the books of testimonies and the volumes of agreements.”¹² As time passed, their descendants migrated to different locations, and they claimed that the Yao family in Ruiyun was one of them.



Map 5 Northeastern Fujian

The Second Genealogy provided the history from the arrival at Fujian to the household dividing by Yao Tingyi’s two sons. The Third Genealogy, composed by Yang

¹² “Preface to the Old Ningde Genealogy,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 8-9.

Zhiyuan, continued this journey. According to “the Account of Origin” at the beginning of the Third Genealogy several unknown generations later, a descendant of Yao Tingyi’s elder son moved from Qionglong to Huangbai 黃栢, a village close to the border between Ningde and Gutian. Then, Yao Zhi 姚晔(1284-1344), the founding ancestor of Ruiyun, moved even further inward from Huangbai to the mountainous Ruiyun village to “escape from the Yuan dynasty.” Yao Zhi and one of his grandsons, Yao Zirong, thereafter stayed in Ruiyun and became the ancestors of the people in Ruiyun.¹³

The attempt to connect these two genealogies was also shown in the Account of Descent Line in the Third Genealogy. The first several pages of the descent line were noted as being copied from the Ningde Genealogy, which began from Yao Tingyi, the founding ancestor of Ningde, and ended with Yao Zhi and his father and uncle. From the next page, the descent line began with Yao Zhi, the founding ancestor of Ruiyun, and began the descent line of the Ruiyun Yaos.¹⁴ From this connection, the Yao family of Ruiyun could be traced to those of Huangbai, Qionglong, and to Yao Tingyi and his numerous descendants in northeastern Fujian. The founding ancestor, Yao Zhi, became the key person bridging the Yaos in Ruiyun with the Yaos in Huangbai and all others.

However, the textual material that related Yao Zhi to *the Old Ningde Genealogy* was weak. Yao Zhi’s name did not appear in the Second Genealogy. The only related people appearing in the Second Genealogy were Yao Zhi’s father and uncle, who were claimed to have very high official degrees, a civil principal graduate (or *primus*, *zhuangyuan* 狀元) and a military principal graduate, respectively. However, these degrees could not be found

¹³ “The Account of Origin,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 13-14.

¹⁴ “The Account of Descent Line,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 25.

in any official records. Their entries in “the Record of the [Heavenly] Grace Granted to the Ningde Yaos” were also different from others in the way that official degrees and names were presented.¹⁵ Additionally, the degrees could not be found in any other Yao genealogies, which was unusual because most Yao genealogies highly valued official degrees. Even in Yang Zhiyuan’s Ruiyun genealogy, i.e., the Third Genealogy, Yao Zhi’s father and uncle were barely mentioned. It seems that the only reason for mentioning Yao Zhi’s father and uncle were to relate Yao Zhi, the founding ancestor of Ruiyun, to the Ningde descent line.

However, the three-part structure of this genealogy demonstrated a strong intention to locate the lineage by framing outside texts in this local composition from distant Huizhou to nearby Ningde. Past genealogists and current scholars knew well that a primary goal for compiling a genealogy was to trace the family origin, either to a historical figure, a geographical center, or a mixture of the two. The most discussed example in Fujian was that many lineage groups throughout Fujian claimed that their ancestors followed Wang Shenzhi 王審知 (862-925), the king of the Min Kingdom, from Gushi 固始 of Guangzhou 光州 (in the current Henan province) to Fujian at the end of the Tang dynasty.¹⁶ These claims traced ancestral origin through textual compilation. Apart from simply indicating the historical errors and considering this practice intentional falsification to glorify certain lineages, recent scholars have emphasized the strategic use of textual sources for practical reasons. By analyzing genealogies near Fuzhou, Michael Szonyi

¹⁵ Only these two in the Second Genealogy were recorded by both their formal names and literary names, and in their brief appearance in the Third Genealogy, only the literary names were used, which were not conventional in these genealogies.

¹⁶ Many examples were listed in Chen, *Fujian zupu*, 93-159.

argued that claiming a migration background from northern China distinguished families from aborigines, who were labelled ethnically and culturally inferior. Comparing the prevailing legend of Zhuji xiang 珠璣巷 widely adopted in genealogies in the Pearl River Delta with other founding stories, David Faure noted that the official connection implied in this legend validated the settlement or property rights in this newly open delta.¹⁷ These strategic aspects of genealogy contextualize the local scene of compiling genealogy rather than treating it as merely literary decoration. The strategic aspects of genealogy also demonstrate the significance of written records and textual compilations to a local community.

For the Ruiyun Yaos in the late sixteenth century, a motive to compile and revise a genealogy was to connect to a larger community by tracing ancestral origins in textual fabrication. During the late imperial period, genealogy compiling was often the largest communal activity of textual fabrication in rural China, particularly in a single-surname community, which was very common in northeastern Fujian. A genealogy was not reading material for specific readers but a reflection of a community where an ideal image was created by manipulating textual sources. In the first and the second parts of the Ruiyun genealogy, the compiler's goal was to connect the Yao family to a broader historical and geographical order where the state was the main narrative. Both Yao Cong, a historical high-ranking official, and Yao Tingyi, also a fabricated historical official, were closely connected to the political authority. These historical reconstructions provided this rising

¹⁷ Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 26-55; Faure, "The Lineage as a Cultural Invention: The Case of Pearl River Delta," 4-36. Another case in the Pearl River Delta, see Liu Zhiwei, "Zuxian puxi de chonggou jiqi yiyi: Zhujiang sanjiaozhou yige zongzu de gean fenxi 祖先譜系的重構及其意義：珠江三角洲一個宗族的個案分析," *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu* 4(1992): 18-30.

family a basis to reconfigure their relationships with the state. Historical reconstructions had a significant meaning in northern Gutian, an area that was traditionally considered unrelated to the local authority in official narratives. During this period of the late sixteenth century, the Yao family eagerly participated in communal affairs sponsored by the local authority and even participated in local government.

Tracing the migration background and claiming to be the descendants of outstanding officials distinguished the family from others in the local community and provided an explanation of the current situation. Yao Tingyi's rejection of the king's offer, his self-exile after the collapse of the Tang dynasty and the subsequent political chaos, and Yao Zhi's escape from the evil Mongol regime, provided reasons why a lineage with a glorious past would be deserted in the distant mountains and lose their connection to the core of the empire. This history implied that the family, represented by a concrete figure in the turbulent period, was forced to escape from the state at a particular historical moment. When they were ready, the family should be able to reconnect to the state and return to their glorious past. This point was further illustrated by the refusal of the official offer from the king of the Min Kingdom in the story of Yao Tingyi in Ruiyun genealogy. In other Yao genealogies near Fuzhou and the neighboring area, this narrative was rarely mentioned. Additionally, these stories of origin provided a specific type of historicity, a common past embedded in the flow of official history, for certain members in local communities to perceive their current condition and even a collective future.¹⁸

¹⁸ This type of story of an émigré official and his sons was quite common in Pingnan. For example, in several genealogies of the Zhangs, the second largest surname in Pingnan, from different villages, Zhang Yan 張巖 (822-915) was taken as the first ancestor migrating to Fujian. In these story, Zhang Yan was a Gushi native and a mid-level local official, who came to Fujian with Wang Shenzhi during the late Tang to pacify the Huang Chao 黃巢 rebellion. He later became, depending on different sources, a high-level civil governor or

These cases of origin-tracing demonstrate that an important task for genealogy compilers was to properly integrate texts from outside their own local compilations. A primary goal of genealogy compilers was to trace ancestral origins to a larger community by providing textual evidence. In studies of Chinese local history, “genealogy,” because of its rich information, was usually considered a useful source of historical studies from a local perspective. However, similar to most “local documents” that were not entirely made locally, the trans-local component of genealogy was often underestimated. In a culturally peripheral region such as northeastern Fujian, it was typical for a genealogist to use outside materials in his own composition, whether to trace the ancestral origins as far as possible or to learn their styles or formats. This occurred frequently when a family compiled their first formal genealogy or when a family tried to reconstruct their genealogical tradition following serious destruction of written records caused by historical events or domestic struggles. In addition to the domestic documents they comprised, outside sources were also important for providing an imaginary framework to locate domestic material. The Ruiyun Yaos used the Wuyuan and Ningde genealogies to place themselves in a larger historical narrative. In addition, many genealogies from the Ming-Qing period used outside sources to expand their scope.

If genealogy compiling is an attempt to construct a community through lineage, then these outside texts provided a sophisticated model of a neo-Confucian lineage to the local

a military commander, and was granted a title of duke – though who granted him the title was not disclosed. Supposedly, almost all the Zhangs in northeastern Fujian were the descendants of his five sons. The Zhangsin Pingnan could be traced to two of them. In addition to confirming the historical link to the state, both the Yaos’ and the Zhangs’ ancestral histories tried to rationalize the current condition of being away from the state. In these stories, they were all descendants of the loyal subjects of the state in northern China, migrated to the mountains in the age of chaos, and were distinguished from uncivilized local aborigines and untamed bandits. See *Shenyang Zhang-shi zupu* 深洋張氏家譜, 43 and *Gantang Zhang-shi zupu* 甘棠張氏族譜, 50-51.

community. Outside texts associated local lineage groups with other institutions that endorsed these principles. Genealogy compiling could contribute to social and cultural integration through its manipulation of local and non-local sources.

State: Encountering the Government

In the dream that Yang Zhiyuan narrated in the preface, Yao Zirong appeared and transmitted his message instead of Yao Zhi, the founding ancestor of Ruiyun and the grandfather of Yao Zirong. After awakening, Yang Zhiyuan immediately realized that this “Master of Ruiyun” was Yao Zirong, not his grandfather who purportedly established this village. According to the Account of Origins and the Account of Biography, Yao Zhi moved from Huangbai to Ruiyun during the late Yuan to escape from the Mongol regime. Yao Zhi had only one son, Yao Zhaolang 姚昭郎, whose description in the genealogy was so insignificant that his existence was scarcely discernible. Yao Zhaolang had three sons. The eldest returned to Huangbai for unknown reasons. The second son enlisted in military service and went to Lingnan. Only the third son, Yao Zirong, stayed in Ruiyun and left his descendants there. The first settler, sometimes called *shiqianzu* 始遷祖 (literally, the first settling ancestor), usually plays an important role in the ritual of ancestral worship and genealogy-compiling. However, in the case of Ruiyun, Yao Zirong, the third generation from the first settler, was regarded “the Master of Ruiyun.”

To understand this difference, we must examine the early records of the Yao family and their relationship to the state. According to the Account of Household Registration, Yao Zirong in 1372, five years after the establishment of the Ming dynasty, “started to be

registered” as a military household. A household was registered in this name that belonged to the Ninth Tithing of the Thirty-First Sector.¹⁹ This registration should be the earliest written record of the Yao family in Ruiyun because the entry says “started to be registered.” Whether this family was registered during the Song and Yuan eras and when they began to settle in this location is unknown. To make the Yao family native residents when they were registered instead of immigrants whose settlement and property rights were often questioned, Yao Zirong could be not the first settler. Therefore, Yao Zirong needed a grandfather to move from Huangbai to Ruiyun, so that the Yao family could claim that they had lived in Ruiyuan for a while, and Yao Zirong inherited the settlement rights. This grandfather could also connect the Yao family to the genealogical line recorded in the Old Ningde Genealogy and, therefore, to a grand historical narrative.

However, after being registered in this new regime, the Yao family had to confront a serious problem: they were registered as a military household. Similar to the Fenglin Yangs discussed in the previous chapter, the Ruiyun Yaos, a very successful family in its later development, found a way to divest themselves of their military obligation. Among ten accounts of the third part, one of them, the Account of Military Service, was written to explain their household status and justify their exemption from military obligations. This section was so important that Yang Zhiyuan placed it fourth before the Account of Descent Line and the Account of Family Admonitions, which were regarded important and usually placed immediately after prefaces in later genealogies. As Yang Zhiyuan explained in his introductory paragraph to the Account of Military Service, “people usually regard [the

¹⁹ “The Account of Household Registration,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19. Whether “Yao Zhirong” was a name of a real person or a name for registration is not sure. Sometimes the name used for household registration was taken as the name of the early ancestor by the descendants.

obligation] of military service as a hotbed of disasters because the service never ends no matter how many generations pass, and the travel and equipment expenses for conscripted members are bottomless.”²⁰ The story in this account explains how the Yao family could avoid this nightmare.

According to this story, Yao Zhirong had an elder brother, Yao Zirun 姚子潤, who was brave and outstanding. In 1376, the court decided to defend the pirates on the southeastern coast.²¹ The Yao family was drafted and stationed at the Lianzhou 廉州 garrison, which is in modern Hepu 合浦 county in Guangxi province close to the Chinese-Vietnamese border. Initially, their father wanted to serve, but the younger brother, Yao Zhirong, was too young and could not bear his father leaving.²² Yao Zirun knew his father’s worry and brought his wife with him as he served in Lianzhou. In Lianzhou, Yao Zirun was soon assigned to defend the pearl-hunting bay and was promoted to commander because of his military feats. Yao Zirun’s descendants flourished and became a reputed family in this region. However, because of the distance, the communication between Lianzhou and Gutian was lost.

Afterward, the Yaos in Gutian became famous for their wealth. The “local rogue” accused them of evading military service and reported the evasion to Mr. Hou 侯, the

²⁰ “The Account of Military Service,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu* 18-19.

²¹ Yu Zhijia claims that this might be a mistake, because according to the official record, the first large-scale conscription in Fujian in 1376 was for pacifying the turbulence in northern borders, and the second large-scale conscription in Fujian in 1387 was for setting up garrisons along southeastern coast to defense pirates. However, there are so many cases in Fujian genealogies claiming that their ancestors were conscripted during the early Hongwu to defense the pirate. See Yu, “Zailun duoji yu chouji,” 200-202.

²² This sentence could also be read as “the father could not bear leaving his young son.” However, according to the birth year in his biographic entry, Yao Zhirong was twenty-two in 1376 and could be the adult males taking military service. In other words, in this story, at least three adult males were qualified to serve in Lianzhou.

investigating censor. The command of filling the vacancy was extremely harsh that the lineage members could only collected one hundred taels for the travelling and equipment expenses and sent Yao Zongzi 宗滋 to fill the vacancy in troops. When Yao Zongzi arrived in Lianzhou, he found that the family of Yao Zirun's descendants in the troops was prosperous. Pleased to meet him, Yao Zirun's descendants made Yao Zongzi stay there for more than one year and, when he returned, gave him one hundred taels. Upon his return, Yao Zongzi showed the documents to the censor, and the local rogue was silenced. Because of this document, the Yaos proved that they had fulfilled their duty; they did not have to send an adult male from their family and were exempt from all travel and equipment expenses.

This story combines the elements in the stories from the Fenglin Yangs and the Boyuan Sus that we observed in the previous chapter. Similar to the Fenglin Yangs, they claimed they solved the problem of military obligation at the beginning of the Ming period. The Yangs' ancestor, Yang Yili, died on his way to Nanjing, and, without any adult male, their military obligation should be dissolved. With more than one qualified adult male in the family, Yao Zirun accepted the service and the family in Ruiyun lost contact with him. Both Yang Yili's widow, Mrs. Yang, and Yao Zirun's younger brother, Yao Zirong, became legendary figures in their family history. Similar to the Boyuan Sus, the Ruiyun Yaos were also accused by their neighbors of not honoring their military obligation. Both were wealthy families, though the Boyuan Sus claimed they were registered as a commoner household in the beginning and the Ruiyun Yaos claimed they actually had honored their duty. This type of accusation was not unusual with local wealthy families.

Whether this story is true is uncertain, but there are several contradictions if we read it together with other records. First, according to this story, in 1376, Yao Zirong was described as being “too young to leave his father,” but according to his birth year in the Account of Biographies, he would have been twenty-two years old in 1376. In addition, according to the Account of Household Registration, which was mostly based on official records, their family was registered in the name of Yao Zirong in 1372. This registration is very strange because both his father and his elder brother were alive, but the household was registered in the name of eighteen-year-old Yao Zirong.²³ Second, in other parts of the genealogy, the name of Yao Zirong’s (and Yao Zirun’s) father is revealed as Yao Zhaolang (although except for the name, everything else is obscure). However, in this story, Yao Zhaolang is only vaguely identified as “father,” the only person without a name in the whole Account. This unusual condition makes this narrative more like a “story.” It is very possible that the genealogical line of the Yao family, including the names of their ancestors before Yao Zirong, was constructed after the formation of this story, and this story might appear during the accusations in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. During the accusations, the members of the household did not seem very clear regarding this episode concerning Yao Zirong and his brother, or did not have a good proof of it. Thus, the members of the household had to select one adult to go to Lianzhou. This story of Yao Zirong might have been constructed to show that they did not violate official regulations or evade their military obligation from the very beginning.

Although the story of Yao Zirong and his elder brother is doubtful, the Yao family might have given money to a family member and sent him to accept the military service

²³ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19 and 41.

when they were accused by “local rogues”— mostly other families with feuds. The story shows the importance of written records: Yao Zongzi brought back the document from Lianzhou as evidence so that the Yao family could be exempted from paying travelling and military expenses. Moreover, at the end of the Account of Military Service, the compiler, Yang Zhiyuan, lamented that Yao Zongzi, vulgar and humble,²⁴ only received money from Yao Zirun’s descendants and did not ask for their genealogy back. Thus, the Yao family lost the chance to make the connection to the prosperous Yao in Lianzhou. What he could do now, Yang Zhiyuan said, was to tentatively write down the story he heard, and there must be someone who could prove it later.²⁵ This comment suggests that the story of Yao Zirong was first written down when the genealogy was compiled in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yang Zongzi’s “mistake” of not bringing the Lanzhou genealogy back provides a convenient explanation regarding why the Yao family lost contact “again” with their prosperous relatives in Lianzhou.

According to the generation order of Yao Zongzi, this accusation should occur from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, the Yao family were able to break the restriction of military household before their alleged contact with the descendants of Yang Zirun in Lianzhou. Before the mid-Ming era, military households could not be divided because people could divide their registered military household and evade military service.²⁶ However, according to the Account of Household Registration in 1435, Yao Zirong’s second son, Yao Zengbao 姚增保, became the chief household of the First

²⁴ Yao Zongzi might come from a weaker branch, so that he was chosen to take the service. As an important person in their family history, he does not have a biographic entry in this genealogy. This partly proves his low status in the whole Yao lineage.

²⁵ “The Account of Military Service,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19.

²⁶ *Ming huidian*, 20/5a.

Tithing in the Thirty-First Sector and collected taxes and tributes for this tithing.²⁷ A chief household must be affluent, and must become a registered commoner household in this tithing. In the records, the Yao family was registered in the Ninth Tithing of the Thirty-First Sector as a military household since 1372. Being the chief household of a tithing of commoners means they broke the restriction of military household and acquired another commoner household.²⁸

How the Yao family could acquire a registered commoner household was not explicitly disclosed in the genealogy, but their wealth was most likely one reason. According to his biography, Yao Zengbao was described as being good at “managing his wealth.”²⁹ This type of manipulation, registering a new household, was common for wealthy families to avoid military service. Moreover, it was briefly recorded that Yao Zhengbao’s second son became a clerk in the Provincial Administration Commission, which was the primary institution of territorial and financial administration in the provinces.³⁰ Access to official documents would make it easier to manipulate registered records.

This was not the only household that the Yao family acquired after breaking the restriction of military household. The Account of Household Registration lists seven commoner households at the time the genealogy was compiled. These seven households

²⁷ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19.

²⁸ In the early Jiajin reign (1522-1566), because some military households became too large, large military households were forced to be divided in some places. See Yu Zhijia, “Lun Mingdai de fuji junhu yu junhu fenghu 論明代的附籍軍戶與軍戶分戶,” *Gu Cheng xiansheng jinian ji Ming-Qing shi yanjiu lunwenji* 顧誠先生紀念暨明清史研究文集 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 2005), 80-104, especially 93-96. However, the Yao family’s gained a new household before the Jiajin period.

²⁹ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

were registered from the early fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, and were supposed to cover members of the Yao family that this genealogy included. Among these seven households, three were chief households in the Thirty-First Sector near Ruiyun village, two were subordinate households in the Thirty-First Sector, one was a chief household of the Precinct (*fang* 坊) in the county seat of Gutian, and one was a chief household in Loyuan 羅源, another county in northeastern Fujian.³¹

Instead of a physical community or a biological group, this Account clearly considered a “household” an officially registered unit, which was hereditary but could be transferred and shared. The compiler provided detailed information and clarified the distribution of obligations for each household. For example, a chief household was registered under the name of Yao Tianfu 姚添富³² in the Tenth Tithing of the Thirty-First Sector. This household belonged to the Gold Branch, the descendants of Yao Dehai 姚得海 (1456-1506), who was the grandson of Yao Zirong. The obligation of this household was divided in eleven shares. A very strong family took five of these shares, and six other families each took one. In total, seven “families” shared one household. According to a comment from a magistrate mentioned earlier, wealthy people registered several families in one household to avoid official duties. Basically, these shares were divided according to each family’s ability instead of their lineage order. For example, one of the six families that took one share was actually the combination of the descendants from Yao Dehai’s first and

³¹ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 20.

³² No one in Yao family was named “*tianfu*.” This is a registered name, not a name of real person. Sometimes families used an auspicious name instead of a person’s name to register their household. “*Tianfu*” literary means “getting more blessings,” and another Yao’s household was named “*shichuan*” 世傳, which means “transmitted generation by generation.” No one in the Yao family, at least those recorded in the genealogy, had this name.

third sons, and the descendants of his second son took one share. The remaining nine shares were taken by the descendants of Yao Dehai's fourth son, Yao Zongtao 姚宗滔 (1493-1564), the richest son who we will meet later.³³

These detailed records of household registration in this Account clarified the official obligation that each member must accept according to his registered household and his lineage position, which was obvious because the descent line was also recorded in the genealogy. According to Yang Zhiyuan's conclusion at the end of this Account, "Precincts and communities have different obligations. Chief households and subordinate households have different missions. Isn't this [the reason for] household registration?"³⁴ These records of the duties that each family accepted also disclose the power relationships among them. The powerful families usually accepted more responsibility and led the entire lineage. Yang Zhiyuan said in the same conclusion: "The registrations and dissolution of households are closely related to the rise and fall of family members. The sudden promotion and decline of each household are due to their fate."³⁵ However, among these seven registered households included in this genealogy, one was missing. The military household registered under the Ninth Tithing of the Thirty-First Sector during the Hongwu period did not appear in the overall records compiled in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Apparently, the Yao family had disposed of this burden, and no one had to assume its obligation when the genealogy was compiled.

Although the genealogy had taken one chapter, the Account of Military Service, to explain their settlement of military obligation, in the beginning of the Account of

³³ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Household Registration, it was reminded again: “People are registered in the state, and military households were not permitted to be divided. This was for supporting the emperor. However, although the Yaos were registered as a military household, the members they sent to the troops became prosperous [in their stationed location], so that their relatives [in the original household] did not have to worry about the service and their household could be divided or combined by their own will.”³⁶ Most likely because the Yao family had been accused of evading their military obligation, both Accounts emphasized that their exemption from military obligation was legal. This justification would be very important during the late sixteenth century when the Yao family tried to promote themselves in the network of local elites and compiled this genealogy.

Although the Yao family’s genealogy is not an official document, several parts dealt with their relationship to the state, and their relationship to the state also shaped the content. As the “Master of Ruiyun,” Yao Zirong’s position is especially the result of their contact with the state. The multifaceted significance of Yao Zirong was beyond the biological connection as the Yaos’ ancestor. His name represented the acquisition of a legal status from the state authority during the administrative reform at the beginning of the Ming dynasty and a closer contact with the government under the general trend of political integration in the early fifteenth century. Moreover, Yao Zirong was a symbol of the first authoritative written record of the Yao family in the textual world, which made him “the Master of Ruiyun” who came to Yang Zhiyuan’s dream and urged him to create the written history of his descendants. The story of Yao Zirong and his brother Yao Zirun, combining

³⁶ “The Account of Household Registration,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19.

the meanings in these three layers, was to explain their duty to the state and the early history of their family.

Previous studies have shown how the presence of state, or the institution of local administration, influenced the way that local communities organized themselves. These studies have also shown how local communities, responding to the administrative intervention from the state, adjusted the principles of their organization. A key period that was usually noticed was early Ming activism.³⁷ During this period, official documents, with administration through written texts, came to many local communities. In the case of Ruiyun, this historical process of textual and political integration greatly influenced the compilation of genealogy in two aspects. First, many contents of the genealogy were either based on official documents, such as records of household registration, or concerned the family's responsibility to the state. Second, the formation of early family histories was largely shaped by their encounters with the state, such as Yao Zirong as "Master of Ruiyun." These "archives of a lineage" became evidence of legitimacy for this community authorized by the state. This outline shaped by state intervention also became a foundation for this group of people to perceive their family history and themselves. Therefore, genealogy became a bridge, textually communicating between the state authority and local communities.

³⁷ Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 56-89; Liu, *Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian*; Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*.

Society: Entering the Elite Network

From the first household registration in 1372 to the 1630s when Yang Zhiyuan revised the genealogy, this migrant family from the mountains became a prominent family of gentry in Gutian County. Although there was no record or story of uxori-local marriage in the Yaos' genealogy,³⁸ the early development of the Ruiyun Yaos relied heavily on their affinity relationships. In the Account of Biography, only the biographical entry of Yao Zirong was combined with his wife, Zheng Shiniang 鄭十娘 (lit. the tenth daughter of the Zheng), as a “*hezhuān* 合傳 (combined biography).” In this biographical entry, Yao Zirong's efforts in Ruiyun, including building houses and expanding farmlands, were “in fact aided by Mrs. Yao née Zheng.” Zheng Shiniang also donated money to build bridges in this area and carved her name on them.³⁹ The Yaos even acquired the ownership of a mountain from Zheng Shiniang's father, and this mountain became the burial place of Yao Zirong, Zheng Shiniang and several of the Yao's early ancestors.⁴⁰ When the Yao family of Ruiyun was first registered in 1372, their household was registered in the Ninth Tithing of the Thirty-First Sector of which the Zheng family was the chief household.⁴¹ The elevation of Zheng Shiniang's presence in the genealogy implied that the early development of the Yaos was greatly benefited from their affinal relationships with the powerful Zheng family in the same locale.

³⁸ The popularity of uxori-local marriage and its meaning in genealogies, see Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, 36-42.

³⁹ See Yao Zirong's biographic entry in “The Account of Biography,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 41. There is a small stone bridge, carved the name of Yao Zirong and his wife Zheng Shiniang, in Ruiyun village now, but it is difficult to prove whether this bridge was the original one in fifteenth century or had been rebuilt.

⁴⁰ “The Account of Grave,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 96.

⁴¹ “The Account of Household Registration,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 19.

As mentioned earlier, the descendants of Yao Zirong's second son, Yao Zhengbao, soon became wealthy and acquired a household registered in neighboring tithing in 1453; one of his sons became a clerk in the provincial government. Their economic and political status continued to rise in the following decades. In 1549, the one of Yao Zirong's descendants was appointed by the county magistrate to collect the taxes of their community,⁴² and Yao Zongtao, the fourth son of Yao Dehai, became extremely rich. According to his biographical entry, Yao Zongtao, who lived during the sixteenth century, was so rich that after dividing his wealth and transferring it to his two sons while he was still alive, he accumulated enough wealth to be divided between his sons again. Yao Zongtao's first wife was a daughter of the Zhengs, and his second wife was "good at accumulating wealth."⁴³

Silver Mining and the Rise of the Yao Family

As told by the genealogy, the primary economic source for the Yao family was the accumulation of land. However, compared with other villages, such as Zheyang, Ruiyun was in a mountainous area and the arable lands were relatively small. The most important economic source for the Yao family would have been silver mining. One of the three large silver mine fields in Gutian county, Youjiakeng 游家坑, was in the Thirty-First Sector just east of Ruiyun village. Ruiyun village was so close to the Youjiakeng silver mine field. In the east neighborhood of Ruiyun village, there is currently a small settlement called "Silver Mining Field 銀坑廠". Although the genealogy tried to downplay the importance of silver mining and emphasized traditional sources such as the accumulation of land, the early

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See Yao Zongtao's biographic entry in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 43.

development or even the settlement of the Ruiyun Yaos would have been deeply related to silver mining. The Yao family might have engaged in this occupation earlier than they claimed and even operated illegally.

Silver mining was important and controversial in the Ming dynasty. Silver and the taxes on silver mining were a crucial income source for the empire, and this was particularly true in the late Ming era when the empire suffered from serious financial pressure. However, the desire for silver also caused many problems. Throughout most of the Ming dynasty, silver mining was monopolized by the state. In 1503, an edict announced that anyone in Fujian and Zhejiang who opened a silver mine without official permission must be executed. However, there were always private miners who risked their lives because of the high profit. From the official perspective, gathering a large number of migrants to work in the mountains was dangerous. In the later period, several long-term silver mine fields were exhausted, and many disturbances in the mountains were caused by workers who did not get paid.

Except for conflicts with unruly mineworkers from other locations, local residents were often forced to share the silver tax of which the quota was fixed, even though the fields were unprofitable or deserted. Some officials or powerful local families took this opportunity to seek private profits. They persuaded higher officials and obtained permission to open a silver mine field, even though this field had been closed for some time. In the name of collecting silver tax, these officials and families forced the local people to pay them the money, and these extortions also caused local unrests. For these reasons,

throughout the Ming dynasty, many mine fields were opened or closed by the government several times.⁴⁴

In the Fujian province, silver mining was complicated because many silver mine fields had been open for a long time. Many silver mines were first opened during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) when the court moved southward and the state endured serious financial pressure. However, many of these long-term silver mines were nearly exhausted, though a large number of miners still moved around the mine fields scattered in the mountainous areas of the Fujian and Zhejiang provinces. A large-scale rebellion led by a silver miner, Ye Zongliu 葉宗留 from southwestern Zhejiang, erupted in 1444 and lasted for four years. Ye Zongliu conspired with another rebel, Deng Maoqi 鄧茂七 in the Fujian province, and this rebellion spread to inland Fujian and Zhejiang and reached the Jiangxi borders in a short time. This rebellion was the largest during the Ming dynasty on the southeastern coast. In the Gutian province, where three silver mine fields were located in the north, a group of miners led by Zhou Maliang 周馬良 occupied the Youjiakeng mine fields and nearby mountains and harassed local villagers. The government sent approximately one hundred soldiers to pacify these “miner-bandits” in 1523. After the pacification, these soldiers were ordered to station here. Official records claimed that these miner-bandits caused serious difficulties with the local people, who, grateful to the leading officer, built a shrine to him while he was still alive.⁴⁵ After this disturbance, the government sent several officials to open the Youjiakeng mine field in

⁴⁴ Liang Fangzhong 梁方仲, “Mingdai yinkuang kao 明代銀礦考” *Liang Fangzhong jingjishi lunwenji* 梁方仲經濟史論文集(Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 90-131; *Mingshi* 明史, 81/1970-1973. *Daming huidian* 大明會典, 37/692b-695a.

⁴⁵ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 3/28b-29a, 5/34b-35a, 7/11b.

1532 but soon stopped because the mine had been exhausted. The government left some soldiers to watch this mine field, and in 1571, a formal order was sent to close this silver mine field.⁴⁶

According to the genealogy, the Yaos' involvement in silver-mining began with Yao Zongtao. Attracted by possible profits from silver, Yao Zongtao made his two sons, Yao Jingcheng 姚景澄 and Yao Jingze 姚景澤(1506-1559), to organized silver-mining. Yao Jingcheng and Yao Jingze hired approximately one thousand miners but obtained almost nothing from the mine field. Yao Jingcheng and Yao Jingze soon ran out of money, and without provisions and getting paid, the miners were forced to mutiny. To pacify this disturbance, the government sent troops to kill the rebellious miners. After the situation settled down, the government condemned the organizer for causing the incident. Afraid of being charged, Yao Jingcheng and Yao Jingze escaped and moved to the county seat of Gutian.⁴⁷

Because this incident could affect the reputation of the Yao ancestors, the description in the genealogy was ambiguous and euphemistic; some facts might have been hidden. However, according to their biographical entries, Yao Jingze, who did not agree to open the mine field from the beginning, hid himself and was not charged. His brother, Yao Jingcheng, was charged but was not convicted. The date of this incident was not revealed, but judging by its details, this incident might have occurred in 1532, and was connected to the re-opening of the Youjiakeng mine field after the disturbance caused by Zhou Maliang,

⁴⁶ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 5/35a; *Mingshi*, 81/1971.

⁴⁷ "The Account of Resident," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 16.

when the official restriction on silver-mining was relaxed in the early sixteenth century.⁴⁸ To maintain a positive image of the ancestors, the genealogy claims that local people were saved from execution because Yao Jingze accepted responsibility. However, another biographical entry discloses that at least one of their lineage members was bludgeoned to death by the government, and his entire family branch moved to another county.⁴⁹ The influence of this incidence on the Yaos should be more serious than the description in either the genealogy or the gazetteer. Many branches other than Yao Jingcheng's and Yao Jingze's moved to other locations during this period without any explanation in the genealogy. Some of these branches were terminated because of no posterity.⁵⁰

New Gentlemen in the County Seat

This incident did not prevent the Yaos from rising as a powerful family in Gutian because they had accumulated many properties, most likely from their mining revenues. After the 1532 incident, Yao Jingcheng and Yao Jingze moved to the county seat, and their descendants thereafter resided there and expanded their influence to the county level. The

⁴⁸ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 5/34b-35a.

⁴⁹ See Yao Shiquan's 姚世權 biographic entry in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 45.

⁵⁰ After moving to Gutian, the Yao family encountered another crisis related to silver mining in 1599. Many silver mine fields were closed to prevent from disturbances caused by silver mining in the early sixteenth century. However, the new Wanli emperor (r. 1573-1620) was persuaded by eunuchs and local officials who intended to take advantages from mining, and from 1596, the emperor sent envoys to conduct mining affairs in several provinces. In 1599, an eunuch Gao Cai 高菜 was assigned to supervise the tax collection and mining affairs in Fujian province. He ordered Yao Jingze's sons, Yao Wenlang 姚文朗 and Yao Wenman 姚文滿, to organize silvering the mining of Youjiakeng mining field, which everyone knew exhausted. Since there were no more silver in Youjiakeng, if the Yao took this service, they would have to pay the heavy silver tax by their own. The Yao therefore collected one thousand taels to bribe Gao Cai and at the same time asked for the county magistrate Liu Yueyang 劉曰暘 to intervene. Eventually the Yao family was able to overcome this crisis and avoided Gao Cai's further extortions. See Ye Xianggao 葉向高, "Yao cegong dongshang zhuan 姚次公東山傳" in "The Account of Literary Writing," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 109-110 and *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 5/35a. This incidence shows the close connection between the Yao family and silver mining. If they were not so related to silver mining, the eunuch would attack some other richer families instead.

two Yaos' descendants soon became influential. Yao Jingze's eldest son, Yao Wenlang 姚文朗, was one of five families who built water mills near the county seat.⁵¹ Yao Jingze's fourth son, Yao Wenyan 姚文元 (1547-1598), allegedly burned one thousand loan receipts to relieve the burden of borrowers – which meant he was wealthy enough to do this and he was a primary creditor in this area. While currency began to be widely used in markets or for tax payment, the Yaos increased their wealth through loan interest. In his biography, Yao Wenman 姚文滿 was praised because he only received minor interest from borrowers and none from the poor. This record indicated loan interest was one source of the Yaos' income, and in normal conditions, interest was high.⁵²⁵³

Since the mid-sixteenth century, the Yao family adopted different strategies to promote the status of their family. First, the Yaos always maintained good official relationships, and being in the county seat, they promoted their relationships to the local government more eagerly. In 1549, the county magistrate assigned the Yao family to collect taxes in their community. In 1603, the son of Yao Wenman was assigned by the county magistrate to address the affairs of taxes and labor services in the county seat. This type of service was usually assigned to a local wealthy family with good official relationships, especially the service in the county seat, which was usually complicated and difficult.⁵⁴ Although the family who took this service might have to spend their own money, the tax reform of the mid-sixteenth century made this position more influential in

⁵¹ These water mills were later destroyed by the county magistrate Liu Yueyang around 1600s to prevent from floods. *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 2/10b-12a.

⁵² Ye, "Yao cegong dongshang zhuan," 109-110.

⁵³ See Yao Wencong's and Yao Mengzhao's biographic entries in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 47 and 53.

⁵⁴ "The Account of Household Registration," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 20.

the county. The Yaos also zealously participated in public affairs supported by the local government, particularly during this period. At the time, Gutian County was severely harassed by rebels from the mountains and pirates from the sea; support from a local wealthy family was necessary. The Yao family's hunger relief activities were mentioned several times in the genealogy, and they were described as "saving the country from danger" and "responding to [the official request] every time." Yao Jingze's grandson, Yao Menzhao 姚孟釗, was given an honorary title from the county magistrate for his donation of grain.⁵⁵ In addition, they also donated money for manufacturing weapons and building city walls. In 1623, Yao Mengzhao was an important member in the project of rebuilding city walls. This project was initiated by the county magistrate and led by Yu Wenlong 余文龍, the most powerful gentry in Gutian during the late Ming period.⁵⁶ The greatest reward for building a good relationship with the local government was that, during the second silver-mining crisis in 1599, the county magistrate intervened with the imperial envoy to save the Yao family.⁵⁷

Second, after moving to the county seat, the Yao family made their sons participate in civil examinations. During this time, Yao Wenlang and Yao Wenman hired Yang Zhiyuan, who later became their genealogist, as a family tutor. From the generation of Yao Wenlang, the second generation since moving to the county seat, some elements entered the descriptions of their virtue in the biographical entries. Many descriptions in their biographical entries regarded how they respected their teacher and Confucian teachings.

⁵⁵ Yao Mengzhao's biographic entry in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 53.

⁵⁶ *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 2/7a-8a, 5/68b-69a.

⁵⁷ See note 50.

Yao Wenlang “favored Confucian scholars/teachings.” Yao Wenlang’s young brother, Yao Wenluan, though failed the exams, “whatever he said always followed Confucius’ teachings,” and he “tried hard to teach his sons, to make them Confucian scholars.” From his numerous land properties, their rich nephew, Yao Mengzhao, established “the field of lamp oil,” providing the expense of educating their lineage. Yao Wenlang’s eldest son walked ten *li* a day to see his sick teacher until he recovered; one of his cousins tattooed the characters “kong-zi (Confucius)” on his left hand.⁵⁸ Whether this wealthy landlord family practiced Confucianism so soon, these descriptions in the genealogy were the images they tried to build and have recognized. The special stress on “favoring Confucian scholars” during this generation revealed that this family was “not very Confucian” in previous generations.

Before being able to obtain official degrees, the educated sons of the Yao family served in local government as clerks. It began with Yao Wenlang’s youngest brother, Yao Wenchuan 姚文傳(1550-1631), who failed the exam but became a clerk in the prefectural government. Several members of subsequent generations took the civil examinations and at the same time, sought careers as clerks in the local government. Three of Yao Wenchuan’s seven sons worked in the local government as clerks: one in the prefectural government and two in the county government. At least four of Yao Wenchuan’s sons had taken the civil examinations, and one of them passed the provincial exams and became a licentiate. Yao Wenlang’s second son also obtained the degree of licentiate, but he did not take (or failed) the next level exam; he became a secretary in the provincial government.

⁵⁸ See the biographic entries of Yao Wenlang, Yao Wenluan, Yao Mengzhao, Yao Weijin and Yao Mengqi in “The Account of Biography,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 47, 48, 50, 53, 55.

Yao Wenlang's second son later left his work in the provincial government and returned to Gutian to teach his young fellows regarding his lineage. Yao Wenyuan's eldest son was the most successful; he passed the provincial examination but failed the metropolitan examination several times. Finally, Yao Wenyuan's eldest son was selected by the Board of Personnel through "direct appointment by precedents" and became an assistant magistrate of a county in Hunan; he later became the deputy county magistrate of this county.⁵⁹ The long time tutor of the family, Yang Zhiyuan, commented that after ten generations after moving to Gutian, the Yaos finally had their first official, and several younger men had just obtained the qualification. Yang Zhiyuan remarked, "how can one know there won't be a principal graduate among them? Every day I'm waiting to see it."⁶⁰

From the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, several members of the Yaos became gentry members. In addition to participating in civil exams, several family members developed relationships through marriage. In earlier generations, their affinal connections were mostly established with powerful local families near north Gutian, such as the Zheng family in Sandeng 三登 and the Gan family in Jixia. These marriage alliances were bi-directional. Not only their daughters married the men but also their sons married the women in these families, but also their sons married women from them. From the generations of Yao Jingze and before their male members obtained degrees, their young females begun to marry men with official degrees but not from these local families in northern Gutian. The most important affinal connection was most likely the marriage between Yao Wenyuan's elder daughters and Yu Wenlong, whose family was one of the

⁵⁹ See the biographic entries of Yao Wenchuan and his sons in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 49, 52-56.

⁶⁰ Yang Zhiyuan's comment to "The Second Genealogy," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 12.

most powerful in Gutian County. Yao Wen yuan's daughter married Yu Wenlong when he was very young, suggesting they might have had some earlier contact. In 1601, Yu Wenlong became a metropolitan graduate and later, the leading gentlemen in the Gutian county seat. In 1623, the rich Yao family was the main sponsor of the project to rebuild the city walls, which was led by Yu Wenlong. Two years later, Yu Wenlong wrote a preface to the Yaos' newly compiled genealogy, which was placed at the beginning, emphasizing their connection to this politically and culturally well-known figure.⁶¹

Molding a New Image

From the genealogy, we know that the Ruiyun Yaos, at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, was a relatively small family in a mountain village, registered as a military household. The mountain areas experienced economic development partly because of the commoditization and extraction of resources from the mountains and partly because of the increase in population and migration. Through this economic development, the Yaos found a way to accumulate their wealth and became a rich and powerful family in their neighborhood. Several members of the most powerful branch moved to the county seat and gradually participated in official and elite networks at the county level. However, before hiring Yang Zhiyuan as the family tutor in the mid-sixteenth century, none of their members had ever taken civil examinations or engaged in any other literary activities. It is

⁶¹ However, this preface is lost in current copy. By the way, Yao Wen yuan's elder son, the earliest official from the Yao family, started his career as the assistant county magistrate in Hengyang 衡陽 county and ended up with the deputy county magistrate of this county through "direction appointment." Yu Wenlong also started as the county magistrate of Hengyang. I wonder there might be some connection in these appointments. See Yao Xiangzhu's biographic entry in "The Account of Biography," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 56.

fair to infer that before the mid-sixteenth century, the Ruiyun Yaos were a strong local family sustained by their economic power but lacked an official and cultural background.

The development of the Yao family from the mid-sixteenth to the mid- seventeenth centuries seemed typical: a rich local family promoted themselves by accumulating political and social capital through several different but related ways. During this process, the Yaos compiled the genealogy. According to Yang Zhiyuan's own preface, this task began in 1585, fifty-three years after the silver mine disturbance. In this period, the Yaos, led by Yao Wenlang and his brothers, began to win over official recognition. It was imaginable that a well-compiled genealogy following the Confucian rules of lineage was helpful to make this surname group better harmonize with lineage society defined by officialdom. In this genealogy, the most obvious volume for this goal was the Account of Family Admonition. Among sixteen "admonitions," the first eight were related to all types of rituals for initiation, such as weddings, funerals and ancestral worship. The most remarkable principles were "following the ancient rites" and "following *jiali* 家禮(*Family Rituals*)."⁶² These admonitions were certainly not the reflection of what was occurring among the Ruiyun Yaos during this period. Rather, these admonitions were a statement of what the Yao family was supposed to do and an ideal image that they wanted to present: a family with a long tradition who properly followed the Confucian way of life.

From the latter half of the sixteenth century, after the first genealogy was composed, to the early seventeenth century, the Ruiyun Yaos further penetrated the network of the local elite. Several young family members obtained official degrees and one even acquired an official title. Through the affinal relationship with Yu Wenlong, the Yao family became

⁶² "The Account of Family Admonition," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 100-103.

further involved in public affairs, and several leaders of the family obtained honorary titles because of their contributions. In the 1585 genealogy, the compiler may have had to discover words to glorify their family members such as honest farmers, reluctant (and most likely illegal) mining organizers and generous money lenders. However, by the early seventeenth century, the Yao had the following accomplishments to be recorded: students, low-rank officials, clerks, philanthropists, and literati who participated in cultural activities in the county. As Yao Zirong said in Yang Zhiyuan's dream, many outstanding young family members had not yet been recorded in the genealogy, and this was one reason that Yang Zhiyuan had to revise it. Therefore, in the revised version, a large number of biographical entries in the Account of Biography were added and updated. Nearly everyone with a biographical entry in the latter part of this Account either had an official degree or had been to an official academy. In this revised genealogy, being educated and obtaining official degree became a criterion for the descendants, which contrasted with the former part where most family members were praised for their honesty, caution in political affairs, or ability to accumulate wealth.

Although it was not easy to identify the date of recording for most of the content, such as the part regarding "family admonitions," some of the content could be easily recognized as recorded only from the revised genealogy in the early seventeenth century. In addition to biographical entries, one account was the expanded Account of Literary Writing. A small section of this Account contained several articles and poems copied from *the Old Ningde Genealogy*. However, most of the literary writings in this Account were written after 1585, when the first version of the genealogy was compiled. This Account included several poems written to Yao Weishou 姚維綬(1582-?), who was Yao Wenman's eldest son and

only three years old in 1585. Yao Weishou was active in making friends with literati and was one family member who encouraged the revision of the genealogy.⁶³ Another important literary writing added in the revised genealogy was the biography of Yao Wenman, who died in 1600. This biography was written by Ye Xianggao 葉向高 (1559-1627), who had a nationwide reputation as a respected prime minister and scholar. Through Yang Zhiyuan's invitation, Ye Xianggao wrote this article for the country gentlemen.⁶⁴ Despite how he knew Yao Wenman, Ye Xianggao's name was an important symbol for the Yaos' cultural and political connections.

The last two Accounts of the genealogy and the supplemental biographical entries in the Account of Biography played a similar role to the part of tracing ancestral origins: connecting this family to a superior network. The part of tracing ancestral origins established the Yao family's relation to a historical past and geographical center. These three parts concentrated on the connections to different spheres of contemporary and local society such as ritualistic and ideological orthodoxy, official and cultural authority, and the network of local elites. This family tried to transform their social status and public image from rich landowners and miners in vulgar villages to social and cultural elites in the county seat. For this transformation, this group of people not only compiled their family history but also foregrounded the achievements of their current family members in society.

⁶³ "Preface" by Zhang Shaozai, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 121-122.

⁶⁴ Ye, "Yao cegong dongshang zhuan," 109-110.

Community: Organization and Location

Although the title of this genealogy, it would be somewhat misleading to call the work the genealogy of “Ruiyun village.” Only a small number of members included in this genealogy resided in Ruiyun when it was compiled. We know that the two sons of Yao Zongtao bought houses and registered a household in the county seat after 1532, and some of their descendants continued to move to different locations. For example, Yao Wenman and his descendants moved to their property in Jikou 吉口, a little town on the way from the county seat to Ruiyun village. Yao Mengzhao lived in Dachongfeng 大冲鳳, situated on a larger plain close to the county seat (Map 5).⁶⁵ For the rich members of the Yaos, they often had houses in different locations and did not always reside in Ruiyun or the county seat.

There was emigration from Ruiyun village throughout the Ming dynasty. Considering the limited lands in these small valleys, it was natural for the residents to divide the household and seek new opportunities somewhere else. Many of the Yao residents in Ruiyun moved to Maer 馬耳 in neighboring Luoyuan county. This family group maintained relationships with the group in northern Gutian. In the Account of Household Registration, their households were listed along with other registered households in northern Gutian.⁶⁶ For the family members losing contact, their names would not be recorded or hardly mentioned in the genealogy.

⁶⁵ “The Account of Descent Line,” Yao Wenman’s and Yao Mengzhao’s biographic entries in “The Account of Biographic Line,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 53.

⁶⁶ “Account of Household Registration,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 20.

It would also be misleading to suggest that this genealogy covered all the members of Yao Zirong's "descendants." This genealogy was initiated by the descendants of Yao Zongtao: Yao Wenlang and Yao Wenman in 1585 and Yao Weishou in 1623. The information regarding Yao Zongtao's descendants and his lineal ancestors was clear whereas the information regarding his remaining ancestors was very brief or not recorded. In fact, the old man, Yao Zirong, thanked Yang Zhiyuan in his dream for compiling the genealogy of "our branches of Happiness and Longevity 福壽房."⁶⁷ According to the Account of Descent Line, Yao Zirong's five grandsons divided in five branches named after the five elements: Gold, Wood, Water, Fire, and Soil. Yao Zongtao belonged to the branch of Gold, the most powerful branch among the five in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Yao Zongtao's two sons further divided in two branches: the branch of Happiness and the branch of Longevity.⁶⁸ Therefore, sometimes they were called the Happiness branch or the Longevity branch of the Gold branch. As the old man told, this genealogy was basically the genealogy of the Happiness and Longevity branches of the Gold branch of the Ruiyun Yao, though they were only a part of Yao Zirong's descendants.

These two branches seemed to be the leader of all Yao Zirong's descendants.⁶⁹ In the narration of the genealogy, these two branches peacefully led the whole lineage group whereas conflicts among lineage members were hidden in the details. The most serious conflict was in 1585 when an accidental fire from Yao Wenman's property in Ruiyun burned down his and his neighboring relatives' houses. Yao Wenman donated his grains to save his relatives from hunger, but "the bad elements in the lineage" plundered Yao

⁶⁷ "Preface" by Yang Zhiyuan, *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 120.

⁶⁸ "The Account of Descent Line," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 32.

⁶⁹ See Yang Zhiyuan's comment on "The Account of Origins," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 14.

Wenman of his grains and money. This accident made Yao Wenlang and Yao Wenman decide to move out of Ruiyun to a different location.⁷⁰ Because this narration was basically directed by Yao Wenman's descendants, the whole incident might have been euphemized, and the conflicts among them might be more serious. Because this genealogy reflected the perspective from the descendants of Yao Zongtao, the voices from other branches could be oppressed. The whole community should not be as integrated as the genealogy depicted.

It is no coincidence that Yao Wenman and Yao Wenlang decided to move from Ruiyun in 1585, and in the same year, they ordered Yang Zhiyuan to compile the genealogy. One motive to compile the genealogy the first time might concern the internal tension among this surname group, and this powerful branch decided to take action. Although what remained was the revised version, we do not know how this tension was addressed in their first genealogy. However, some traces might be left in an early preface written by a family friend in 1613, before the genealogy was revised. In this preface, the author criticized how miserable the results were of a disintegrated lineage and praised Yao Weishou for his contribution to compile the genealogy and to integrate his lineage.⁷¹ His criticism might be directed towards certain incidents.

Though the information regarding members in other branches was still scarce, the revised genealogy in 1632 was intended to be the genealogy of all the descendants of Yao Zirong from Ruiyun. Different sections of the genealogy show the anxiety of not being able

⁷⁰ "The Account of Resident," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 16.

⁷¹ "Preface by Zhang Shaozai," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 118-119.

to connect with other lineage members.⁷² In addition, Yao Zirong was the common ancestor, and “Ruiyun” was the common “place of beginning 發祥地.” In the preface and both introductory paragraphs of the Account of Residence and the Account of Landscape, Yang Zhiyuan repeatedly stressed that although people moved in and out of Ruiyun, Ruiyun as the “place of beginning” was an unchanging fact. Because of the auspicious aura of Ruiyun, so many outstanding people came from the Yao family.⁷³ This type of local consciousness, or the identity attached to the “place of beginning” might not be new. However, in the case of Ruiyun, it played an important role and became one of the three reasons that the old man urged Yang Zhiyuan to revise the genealogy because “the glorious places of Ruiyun have not been fully illustrated.”

The identity of this lineage was based on two aspects: coming from the same ancestor and coming from the same location. Although in a region where migration occurred often, the emphasis on an unchanging place of beginning became a foundation to construct the identity among a group of people scattered in different locations. Another possible reason for this “identity of place of beginning” might be institutional. Why did the Yaos in this area consider Ruiyun as their “place of beginning” instead of Huangbai, Qionglong, or Dongshu? The distance from Huangbai to Ruiyun was much shorter than the distance from Ruiyun to Maer, and also shorter than the distance from Ruiyun to the county seat of Gutian (Map 5). However, people who moved to Maer still considered Ruiyun their place

⁷² See “Preface to the Old Ningde Genealogy,” and Yang Zhiyuan’s comment to “The Account of Military Service,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 8-9, 19.

⁷³ See “Preface” by Yang Zhiyuan, “The Account of Residence,” and “The Account of Landscape,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 120, 15-18.

of beginning, but people in Ruiyun village did not consider Huangbai the place of beginning.

Ruiyun was the place that the Yao family was registered in the early Ming era. Because the logic of household registration in the early Ming period was to connect a certain group of people to a certain location in the hierarchical district of administration, this bond between a household-community and a location became a proto-consciousness of locality. Although the registered household might be defunct or transferred, in some cases, the descendants shared the hereditary responsibility of their original household. At least on record, this responsibility was attached to a specific location. No material demonstrated whether the Yaos shared the responsibility of their registered household in Ruiyun. However, the household registration associated the Yao surname to Ruiyun village separate from Huangbai, the place where they emigrated. When the lineage building began in the sixteenth century, Ruiyun, combined with Yao Zirong, became the key to connect these people. The image of Yao Zirong as “the Master of Ruiyun” was depicted in the genealogy. The literary description of selected landscapes or memorial locations in their place of beginning, such as the poems in the Account of Landscape, also became a standard component of the genealogies in this area. Many Pingnan genealogies compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a volume of these flowery poems.

This “tracing the place of beginning” also made the lineage group a settled unit, and contrasted with unregistered drifting people in the mountains, who, in official perspectives, were potential criminals and a factor of instability. Through this settled unit, people under the name of this group could negotiate with other social forces in this area, such as the local

government.⁷⁴ Although a similar situation occurred in many place, in northern Gutian, this emphasis of settling was particularly significant. Because migration occurred often, the tension between local government and the drifting people in the mountains was more serious. When these two branches of the Yaos entered the network of the local elite at the county level, they wanted to reinforce an image of settled lineage community in the genealogy and distinguish themselves from the migrant workers they hired for silver mining.

Finally, this genealogy was the product of lineage building and self-promotion of the Yao surname group in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This genealogy was initiated by a small number of members from the lineage group that this genealogy claimed, and these people did not live together in a specific location. In this genealogy, only the graves of ancestors from the Golden Branch were listed in the Account of Grave, and there was no ancestral hall or communal ritual covering all the lineage members proposed in this genealogy.⁷⁵ Rather than a reflection of an organized lineage, this genealogy, proposed by the active family members, was a textual agenda of what this community should be. The emphases on the common ancestor and the common place of beginning were for extending its membership and uniting the disintegrating entity. The discrepancies between the community reflected in the text and the community in social realms should not be overlooked.

⁷⁴ Faure had similar argument in his studies on the genealogies found in the Pearl River Delta. See David Faure, "The Written and the Unwritten: The Political Agenda of the Written Genealogy," in Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, ed., *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History* (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1992), 259-296. He emphasized more on the negotiation with the state, but I think the state, or local government, may not be the only institution that a lineage group had to negotiate with in local society.

⁷⁵ "The Account of Graves," *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 97.

Culture: Spreading a Tradition

From the discussion above, the skill of manipulating different types of texts and the role of who managed this manipulation would be important. In the case of the Ruiyun Yaos, information regarding the genealogist, Yang Zhiyuan, is scarce. Yang, who might have been born in approximately the 1560s, was first hired as a family tutor in his twenties by Yao Wenlang and Yao Wenman and then served this family in northern Gutian for more than fifty years. According to his signature, we know he came from Fuqing 福清, a coastal county in the Fuzhou prefecture. Yang remained somewhat connected with his hometown; he could ask renowned Ye Xianggao to write a biography for Yao Wenman, his employer and the leading member of the Yao family. No material explained why and how he came to Ruiyun as a tutor; however, this loyal tutor from the coastal area eventually composed the earliest genealogy that has survived in this mountain region.

It seemed usual to ask a family tutor not belonging to the lineage group, or some other literary person, to compile the genealogy, especially in the remote regions, where fewer people had sophisticated skills of compilation and editing.⁷⁶ On the contrary, Yang Zhiyuan came from a location with a better literary tradition. His hometown, Fuqing, produced the most Provincial Graduate among the remaining eight counties in the Fuzhou Prefecture during the Wanli period (1573-1620), except for two counties of Fuzhou City

⁷⁶ In 1618, when the Xiagong Yaos in Lianjiang planned to compile a genealogy, they also asked their family tutor to do this job. After their tutor modestly declined, they asked a “friend,” Lin Wenzhao 林聞詔, to do this. The tutor in Xiagong and the genealogist Lin Wenzhao were not Lianjiang native, but came from neighboring Changle. Both genealogists’ hometown, Yang Zhiyuan’s Fuqing and Lin Wenzhao’s Changle were famous for many degree-holders who passed the civil examinations.

(Chart. 4). Because manipulating the texts in compiling genealogy required a high level of literary skill, people with higher literary backgrounds were hired to complete this task. A tutor or a licentiate would be a good candidate.

Chart 4 Number of provincial graduates in Fuzhou Prefecture during the Wanli reign

| | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Prefectural Academy of Fuzhou | 83 | 34% |
| County Academy of Houguan | 48 | 19% |
| County Academy of Min | 42 | 17% |
| County Academy of Fuqing | 40 | 16% |
| County Academy of Changle | 19 | 8% |
| County Academy of Mingqing | 6 | 2% |
| County Academy of Yongfu | 3 | 1% |
| County Academy of Gutian | 2 | 1% |
| County Academy of Liangjiang | 2 | 1% |
| County Academy of Huaian | 1 | 0% |
| County Academy of Luoyuan | 1 | 0% |

The civil examination system was certainly a key institution in creating this environment. These literary specialists generated from this institution led the practice of genealogy compiling – editing the texts, providing material, or writing a preface – in the early stage of development of lineage society in northeastern Fujian. In disseminating a neo-Confucian mode of genealogical compilation and related ideas, these genealogists, professional and amateur, resident or travelling, played an important role. This was not to say that before genealogies or genealogists there was no organized lineage group in this region. However, the introduction of this literary tradition, by providing a textualized lineage history and lineage regulation, took a step further to shape this community into a homogenized form, which could be compatible with other communities, including the state.

As I discuss earlier regarding Yan Zhiyuan's use of genealogies from Ningde and Wuyuan, one significant reason to produce local texts was to integrate resources from other locations in native contexts. During this process, similar forms and contents were shared in a region. For example, in the case of the Yaos, the story of Yao Tingyi and his two sons was also widely adopted in other genealogies of the Yaos in northeastern Fujian; this émigré official almost became a common ancestor of them. In the *Genealogy of the Xiangong Yaos* 廈宮姚氏族譜 (claimed to be first compiled in 1396 and last revised in 1838), the grandson of Yao Tingyi's younger son travelled to the sea and discovered Xiangong, a coastal village in Lianjiang 連江 county (Map 5), in 1009. The grandson of Yao Tingyi's younger son established this village and became the founding ancestor of the Xiangong Yaos.⁷⁷ From coastal Lianjiang to inland Gutian, the descendants of Yao Tingyi, according to written genealogies and other textual records, could also be found in Ningde, Houguan 侯官, Mingqing 閩清 Changle 長樂, Luoyuan 羅源 and Fuan 福安. All of these descendants linked their lineage to that of Yao Tingyi and claimed to be the descendants of Yao Tingyi from Ningde.⁷⁸

It was difficult to determine when the story of Yao Tingyi became a popular history of ancestral origins among the Yao families in different locations in northeastern Fujian. However, during the late sixteenth century, when compiling genealogies became a familiar practice among rising surname groups in this region, a written version of Yao Tingyi's migration had been circulated among genealogy compilers in northeastern Fujian. In the

⁷⁷ "Preface," *Xiangong Yao-shi zupu* 廈宮姚氏族譜.

⁷⁸ For a brief survey of the ancestral origin of the Yao in genealogies, see Zhang Tianlu 張天祿 et al. eds. *Fuzhou xingshi zhi* 福州姓氏志 (Fuzhou: Haichao sheying, 2005), 609-694. I also found some other northeastern Fujian Yao genealogies in the Provincial Library of Fujian sharing the story of Yao Tingyi.

Xiagong genealogy, Yao Tingyi's name was first mentioned in the preface dated in 1562 and another dated in 1618 whereas two other prefaces with earlier dates contained nothing regarding him.⁷⁹ In Ruiyun, when Yang Zhiyuan began to compile the genealogy in 1585, he copied this story from another genealogy acquired in Ningde, "the old Ningde genealogy," as the basis of their ancestral origins.⁸⁰ Although the exact route of regional textual exchange was not always clear, it showed that the direct or indirect communication of genealogical texts became active during this period in northeastern Fujian.

However, circulation by hand-copy did not guarantee the stability of the story. The compiler could rearticulate the details in his own composition, and there were always inconsistencies in each version. The stories told in Ruiyun and Xiagong, which were composed approximately at the same time, were similar, and many details were different from each other, and from the various versions appearing in genealogies compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the Ruiyun genealogy, Yao Tingyi declined the official offer and his descendants retreated to the mountains whereas in the version of Xiagong, which is a coastal village, his descendants became sea travelers and discovered this precious land. In the version of Xiagong, it was mentioned that Yao Tingyi came from Shaanxi, which proved their northern Chinese cultural roots and distinguished them from aboriginal Dan 蜑 people in the coastal area. In the version of Ruiyun, the roots from northern China was not mentioned at all but it was observed that Yao Tingyi came directly from Zhejiang, which might better match their findings in Jiangnan and the genealogy

⁷⁹ *Xiagong Yao-shi zupu*, 9a, 10a.

⁸⁰ It was less possible that the Yao family in Ruiyun brought this "old Ningde genealogy" with them from Huangbai to Ruiyun; otherwise, Yang Zhiyun would not say the Yao family in Ruiyun has neither genealogy nor family history for three hundred years.

from Huizhou. Nevertheless, the details of narratives regarding Yao Tingyi and his descendants were sometimes different and even contradictory. However, a large number of families in scattered corners of northeastern Fujian considered Yao Tingyi their first ancestor in Fujian, or their genealogists adopted this story to trace the ancestral origin when compiling genealogies. These genealogists played an important role to disseminate the tradition of genealogy as well as sharing forms and content with different corners of this region.

During the same period, the ideas expressed from the content of genealogies and the practice of compiling genealogies also indicated the growing importance of written texts in lineage building and other social activities. In the description from “the Preface to the Old Ningde Genealogy” in the Second Genealogy of Ruiyun, at the gathering before the household divided, Yao Tingyi’s two sons prepared two “Books of the Family,” and Yao Tingyi ordered the descendants to properly preserve them as written testimony. This episode might not have actually occurred in the ninth century, and might not have been written down during the Song dynasty as the preface suggested. Being reiterated in a conspicuous section of a genealogy in the sixteenth century, however, showed the attitude toward written texts of a certain group of people.⁸¹ This attitude drove Yao Shiluan to travel to distant Wuyuan to acquire textual evidence of their ancestral origin, which began the project of revising the genealogy.

Later in the same preface, the author lamented that a branch of their lineage moved to Fuzhou and became successful in civil examinations, but because the “family documents” were lost, they could not establish the connection and the common descent with this branch.

⁸¹ “The Preface to the Old Ningde Genealogy,” *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 8-9.

Because of this inability, the family became strangers. Therefore, they needed to compose this genealogy to prevent this type of tragedy in the future. This lament conveyed two related ideas. First, an extended relationship could be established simply on a **common descent**, regardless of distance or the actual alienated relations. Second, a common descent could be easily proved by the confirmation of **written texts** inherited from previous generations. The combination of these two ideas was the bedrock of the efficacy of a written genealogy.

During the late Ming era in northeastern Fujian, the growing importance of written texts and the growing interest in lineage building interlocked with one another. Previous studies in different time periods and regions suggested the relation between the construction of community and the techniques of communication. Most studies of this type focused on a more extensive community and tended to respond to a certain degree of modernization theory.⁸² However, there is no reason to dismiss this relation in pre-modern China, especially regarding how to build the identity among members of an extensive community and to maintain and perpetuate organization in the pre-modern period. The key instrument to build a lineage organization required written text as a medium to transmit the Neo-Confucian ideology and its method of lineage organization. Written text also reified regulations and agreements among lineage members or between lineage communities and other social institutions. In addition, written text recorded specific facts or fabrications to be shared by individuals scattered in different time periods and locations.

⁸² For example, both Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner stressed the importance of the mode of communication when analyzing the rise of nationalism and modern nation-state. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

However, most of the time, written texts did not automatically become an effective instrument of lineage building. To be effective, written text had to fulfil a degree of literary skill, and the textual evidence had to be authorized by certain social forces. The further penetration of official documents since the early Ming era accelerated this process, and the specific historical context of a rising family created this need. At this time, the leading members of the Yao family made Yang Zhiyuan compile and revise their genealogy. However, how many members included in this textual construction were familiar with this practice and the ideologies behind it is questionable. In the cultural sphere, this complicated compilation of lineage texts transmitted a certain pattern of lineage formation and textual production to northern Gutian. However, the genealogy was compiled after the leaders of this project moved to the county seat (we see a similar condition in the activities of lineage building of the Fenglin Yang family mentioned in the previous chapter). Not all the families or lineage organizations in northern Gutian moved to the county seat and needed to compile a formal genealogy. Moreover, within the Yao family, although the genealogy claimed to cover more people, only a small group of elite members were directly involved in this practice as I note in the previous section. In my limited historical sources, I do not see the responses from other groups that I observe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Conclusion

The Ruiyun Yaos' genealogy and its revision were created under the trend of lineage-building in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in northeastern Fujian.

To textually “build a lineage,” each component of the genealogy had its own role. This role either located the family community in a broader structure that defined its relationships with other institutions or shaped the identity sharing of all members, which marked the boundaries to other individuals or social groups.

By connecting outside and local written materials, the compiler traced the common ancestor and placed him in a general historical configuration. This placement bridged the peripheral community to the grand historical narrative of the state, reinforced the distinction from its ahistorical neighbors, and in later periods, granted the family the qualification of a great surname group. Meanwhile, a genealogy also strengthened the symbolic significance of a common ancestor and common place of origin, which were theoretically shared by all the members of this lineage community. By compiling a genealogy, powerful family members were able to claim leadership and determine the criteria of membership.

Although the outline of a local community was greatly influenced by its interaction with other social institutions, such as the state, a genealogy, as the official archives of a local community, also played a role in its negotiation with the state. With the penetration of official documents and the system of administration by texts, and the combination of lineage groups and registered households that became a functional administrative unit to local government, genealogy became an effective medium containing the contractual agreements with the state. Through genealogy, the family’s duties and obligations to the state authority were recorded.

Following the economic and political transformation of the mid-Ming era, some Yao families began to join the established network of local elites. These local elites were

defined by their relationships to the state apparatus, their social connections, and their cultural performances centered in the county seat. The efforts to compile and revise the genealogy were, first, to create a lineage tradition for the Yaos – at that time, only two self-claimed branches of Happiness and Longevity of the Gold branch – and make them compatible with a lineage society that became a prevailing order in the center of Gutian County. Second, the achievement of the genealogy's transformed members needed to be recorded to support the new image of this community.

We do not know the contents of the first version compiled in the 1580s, but the purposes of the revised genealogy are well presented through the words of the Master of Ruiyun in Yang Zhiyuan's dream. The origin of the Yaos must be thoroughly traced so that their early history could be elucidated, and their family could be placed under a general historical, cultural and political framework. The current outstanding young members must be entirely recorded so that their lineage achievement could be manifested, and their family could be compatible to the current elite network. The glorious places of Ruiyun must be fully illustrated so that all the family members could identify with a common ancestor and a common place of origin and become a solid lineage organization.

Furthermore, although genealogy compilation was a general trend since the late Ming period, genealogy practices in Ruiyun occurred in specific historical contexts. A minor family discharged the restriction as a registered military household and became wealthy most likely from illegal silver mining. The family maintained good relationships with local officials and were appointed to collect taxes. After accumulating a certain amount of economic and political resources, some leading members expanded their influence in the

county seat and eagerly joined the network of local elites. Under this specific context of upward mobility, these texts were produced.

From this case in Ruiyun, we can see how a minor family in a marginal region adopted a textual tradition to further promote its cultural status while its economic, social and political statuses were rising. Several literary resources, such as official records, texts from other regions, family documents, literary works and oral stories, were used for different sections of the genealogy. Although it should be a genealogy of “the Yao family” and several parts were compiled for this lineage group, a large part of the genealogy was made to respond to other institutions and neighboring communities. Different from most lineage documents, family accounts and contracts, this type of formal genealogy was founded on a certain literary tradition and was used to show its cultural capital.

Although formal genealogies were relatively few and mostly limited to a few prestigious surname groups throughout the Ming dynasty, they prevailed since the mid-Qing, when the general social, political and economic structure greatly changed. Not only genealogies but also many other genres could be found in northern Gutian after the eighteenth century. In the first three chapters, I draw a general picture of the relationships between texts and society in northern Gutian. We observe that the basis of textual culture was formed in the interactions between political institutions and local communities. In Part II, I will further investigate the expansion of textual culture and practices in different spheres of village life.

Part II

Pingnan County: New County and New Order, the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries

In 1717, after a long interruption, four branch leaders of the Gan family of Jixia village, located in the Twentieth-Second Sector, together signed a seven-page agreement for the “rebuilding” of their ritual of ancestral worship in which it was decided that each of the four branches would take turns in holding the ritual. They quote a sentence from Zhu Xi in the agreement that stresses the importance of ancestral worship and claim that the ritual they followed in this agreement came from the model set in the generation of their great-great-grand father. The latter half of the agreement consists of a long list of the items that the host had to prepare for the ritual; the list included details such as the amount of meat, which would be divided amongst the participants after the ritual. In addition to the agreement, four other documents were compiled at the same time and bound together with this agreement: a long list of their ancestors’ names tracing back twenty generations to their founding ancestor in Jixia, two signed contracts that assigned two fields to be cultivated by a lineage member who had to cover the expense of the annual ritual from the income of these fields, and a note recording the years that each branch should hold the ritual. Thirteen years later, Gan Yuanfu 甘元膚, who composed the contracts in 1717 and possibly also the other documents, started to compile the genealogy of the Gan family. It took him six years to collect documents and complete the genealogy; Gan Yuanfu’s

genealogy was one of the first formal genealogies in this region since the establishment of the new dynasty.¹

In 1685, the abbot of Xiangfeng Monastery (*xiangfeng si* 祥峰寺) in Tangkou 棠口 village, which was located in the Twenty-Eighth Sector, established a stele that recorded the estates that people had donated to them in the early sixteenth century. The inscription, entitled “The Announcement of the Fields of Xiangfeng Monastery” (*xiangfeng si tianpai* 祥峰寺田牌), was a declaration of the ownership of the properties under their control; significantly, it was produced during the time that social order was gradually being restored after the turbulence of the dynastic transition. In 1697, the abbot established another stele, recording the estates that they had received from another local donor. This inscription lists the locations and the amounts of the estates in detail and emphasizes that the donor was making his offering completely under his own will, and that the donation was openly witnessed by the surrounding “surnames.”²

In 1682, although Zheng Yingsheng 鄭應盛 and his adopted son had moved to a neighboring county from Gutian, through a middleman, they asked for an additional payment for their several estates in the Twenty-Third Sector of Gutian, which had already been sold to Xie Xuanyu 謝玄宇 in Liudun 劉墩 village, also in the Twenty-Third Sector. It was a local custom in southeastern China that people were permitted to ask for

¹ Untitled documents; *Bohai-jun Gan-shi zupu*, 27-28.

² The original characters, “*zhouxing gongyi, jianzheng* 周姓公議見證” on the inscription are ambiguous. It could be literarily interpreted as “[the donation was] openly discussed and witnessed by the surrounding [Zhou] surnames,” but since the main surname in Tangkou is Zhou, it could also be “openly discussed and witnessed by the Zhous [of Tangkou].” However, we do not know whether in the early Qing, the Zhous already dominated Tangkou or not. See “Xiangfengsi tianpai 祥峰寺田牌” and “Xiangfengsi 祥峰寺.”

additional payments for estates that had been sold, though it became a persistent irritant for new owners, who might be subject to a greedy seller who continued to demand additional payments.³ Xie Xuanyu claimed to keep the “red contract”—contract with the red stamp of the local government—that documented their previous transaction and certified that these estates had been officially registered under his household, which means Xie Xuanyu had paid the land taxes of these estates; nevertheless, he agreed to pay twenty taels to Zheng Yingsheng and his son. However, in order to prevent any further harassment, Xie Xuanyu made a contract with Zheng Yingsheng and his son, who promised that they would not ask for any payments in the future. The contract, which was called a “contract completion” (*jinqi* 盡契),⁴ was signed by Zheng Yingsheng, his son, the middleman, a witness, and the person who wrote this contract for them.⁵ This contract was kept together with a series of contracts related to the transactions of these estates by later owners; the 1682 contract is the earliest, and is also the earliest among all the 1,193 contracts I could find in northern Gutian/Pingnan after the chaotic Ming-Qing transition.

In 1716 and 1721, a ritual specialist in Xiling 熙嶺 village located in the Thirty-Second Sector by the name of Wu Bican 吳碧燦 (sometimes in his religious name, Wu Daoxuan 吳道炫) copied several ritual manuals from his collection. He left a short

³ For “additional payments,” various contractual practices of property right, and related disputes, see Thomas M. Bouye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes over Property Rights in Eighteenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92-127. Bouye’s cases came from Guangdong, and for the cases in northern Fujian, see Yang Guozhen 楊國楨, *Mingqing tudi quyue wenshu yanjiu* 明清土地契約文書研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue, 2009), 217-226.

⁴ It means that selling of the estate has been “completely” finalized, so that the seller cannot ask for further payments in the future.

⁵ Contract 13024. The codes of these contracts, a total of 1,196 items, were given by me.

remark at the end of the manuscripts he copied, so that we know that he copied these manuals for his disciples, one of whom was his grandchild.⁶ The manuals he copied contained the scriptures and verses that the specialists recited during rituals. Among the six of his manuals that survive, one is a collection of exemplars of the petitions that a ritual specialist might use to contact different deities on different occasions; the rest are manuals for specific rituals: for example, the manual used in the ritual of “cross-the-passes” (*guoguan* 過關)⁷—a ritual to keep children or young adults away from evil spirits—was copied twice in 1716 for his grandchild who continued his profession, and again in 1721 for his disciples. These manuals were copied using good calligraphy, and in his remarks, he made it clear that the receivers should not discount the value of these copies and should learn them carefully word by word.⁸

Four different genres of texts were created in different corners of Pingnan for different purposes. The lineage documents in Jixia were created by lineage members to rebuild their lineage organization. The two stelae in Tangkou were established by the abbot—though the text was not necessarily composed by him—to declare control over their properties to the public. The contract in Liudun was created by a third-person as written evidence of property transaction. The hand-copied ritual manuals were created by a ritual specialist in Xiling to transmit a set of texts used in ritual performance. What they

⁶ *Ranguan ke* 禳關科 and *Gezhong gongjian* 各種公檢 were copied in 1716, and the former one was specified for his grandson. *Songfo ke* 送佛科, *Jiantan ke* 建壇科, *Qingwang gongwang ke* 請王供王科, and another copy of *Ranguan ke* were copied in 1721 for his two disciples.

⁷ For this ritual and its relation to the belief of the Lady of Linshui, see Bridette Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁸ See the last pages of *Gezhong gongjian* and *Songfo ke*.

shared is that they were all created in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. After the “textual vacuum” in the mid-seventeenth century, people in Pingnan started to produce more texts in different spheres of the daily life.

The Period of Reconstruction and Integration

Although, as I show earlier, the Ming government tried to administer this region by documents, and there was a trend to compile genealogies and other documents during the late Ming, no text dating to the mid-seventeenth century has been found in northern Gutian. Northeastern Fujian was greatly influenced by the violent Ming-Qing dynastic transition and subsequent disturbances. Since southeastern China was where the Ming princes and loyalists built their anti-Manchu regime, rebellions erupted along the sea coast and in the mountains. In 1646, the third year of the Shunzhi reign, a group of local rebels in northern Fujian occupied several county seats—including that of Gutian—and, according to official records, claimed to be “killing the Qing and restoring the Ming.”⁹ Following the dynastic transition, the Three Feudatories Rebellion (1673–1681) devastated the northern part of Fujian once again. Under this chaos, militarized local families fought with one another, and accused each other of being bandits or rebels. Several established families during the late Ming were destroyed, such as the Yao family described in the previous chapter, who was once a prominent family in northern Gutian but was no longer included in most textual

⁹ For a brief comparison of the descriptions of this incident in official records and in local narrations, see *Gutian xianzhi* 古田縣志 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997), 1013–1016.

records since the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁰ Some families, such as the Jitou Zhangs 滌頭張氏 or the Jixia Gans 滌下甘氏, who were previously unknown in any literary sources, ascended to a leading position because of their military success in this chaotic period.¹¹ Most genealogies compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could not provide any written evidence for almost sixty years from the late Chongzhen reign (1628—1644) to the early Kangxi reign (1662–1772). The few retrospective descriptions of this period that we have are mostly about the chaos in local society, “these remote mountains turned into the field of war,”¹² and lament the loss of written documents.

After the pacification of the Three Feudatories Rebellion, local populations and the state started to reconstruct the order. Local organizations, including kinship and religious organizations, were rebuilt and some people started to restore their connections with official power. The presence of state power in northern Gutian was strengthened during the Yongzheng reign (1723–1735) under the emperor’s policy to improve the efficiency of local governance and tighten control over locals. Southeastern China was always a troublesome region because of its mountainous landscape, its long and winding coastline,

¹⁰ Some oral histories still describe the legend of “Yao, the Millionaire” (*Yao baiwan* 姚百萬) from the past, but none of the Yao played an important role in local politics during the Qing. Many of them moved out, and Ruiyun became a small village during the Qing dynasty,

¹¹ According to the Genealogy of the Qiantang Lins 前塘林氏, their village was ransacked by more than three thousand bandits led by Zhang Liangrui 張良瑞 in 1647, during the northern Fujian rebellion of the Shunzhi reign, and this attack caused the decline of their family. Although according to various sources, Zhang Liangrui came from Jitou, in the genealogy of the Jitou Zhangs, his name is not mentioned at all. The genealogy emphasizes that their ancestors during this period were brave and smart, but not taken in by the bandits—even during the period of the Three Feudatories rebellion when “mountain bandits grouped together running amok in our region.” However, the description that their ancestors increased their wealth to several ten thousands taels of silver by “working hard in the field” during this chaotic era casts some suspicion on their ascension and their role in the early Qing. See *Qiantang Lin-shi zupu* 前塘林氏族譜, 6–7; *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu* 溪頭張氏族譜, 113.

¹² *Guanyang Jiangxing zupu* 官洋江姓族譜, 22—23.

its violent struggles among family feuds, and its longtime connection with foreigners; later, it was the asylum of anti-Manchu loyalists and other independent powers. In the last several years of the Yongzheng emperor's reign, several administrative units were established to strengthen the governance of the marginal mountain area in Fujian, which was believed to be the hotbed of bandits and rebels. In 1734, two new departments were established in the southern Fujian inland to supervise the counties far away from the capitals of their prefectures, and one department in northeastern Fujian was promoted to a full prefecture. (Map 1)¹³ At the same time, two new counties were established in northeastern Fujian together with supporting new departments and prefectures; another new county was established five years later.¹⁴ Among these three new counties, one was Pingnan County, which was previously the unquiet northern part of Gutian County. The idea of transforming northern Gutian into a new county had been suggested at least as early as the late sixteenth century,¹⁵ but it only came to fruition in the early eighteenth century after the rule of the Qing empire was stabilized and the Qing emperors tried to further integrate these mountains and valleys into the empire.

In comparison to the dynastic transition from the Yuan to Ming during the fifteenth century, what local people faced was not a series of new institutions imposed by the state,

¹³ The Yongchun 永春 Department was established to supervise Yongchun and Dehua 德化 Counties of Quanzhou Prefecture and Datian 大田 County of Yanping 延平 Prefecture, and the Longyan 龍巖 Department was established to supervise Longyan, Zhangping 漳平 and Ningyang 寧洋 Counties of Zhangzhou 漳州 Prefecture. The Funing 福寧 Department was promoted to Funing Prefecture. The imperial edict about this adjustment was recorded in the gazetteer of Pingnan County composed in 1739. See *Qianglong Pingnan xianzhi*, 158–161.

¹⁴ Besides Pingnan, another one was Xiapu 霞浦 County in the newly established Funing Prefecture, and Fuding 福鼎 County was separated from Xiapu County in 1739.

¹⁵ See Fang Yuanyan 方元彥, "Gutian xian tushuo 古田縣圖說," *Yutian shilue*, 8/1-2.

such as the community-tithing system and military colonies, or ferocious competition among different groups of people. At the local level, the Qing regime did not change the institutions too much at the beginning of their alien rule, but followed Ming regulations that were already in place. The state did not directly intervene in the restoration of local order either; rather, local leaders directed the efforts. Cooperation between the state and local families was further strengthened after the establishment of Pingnan County.¹⁶ While the infrastructure of this new county government was far more capable of controlling its entire jurisdiction, the magistrates relied much more on local leaders to maintain the stability of their rule and establish new institutions. At the same time, these rising local leaders needed to legitimate their new status of dominance, and sought the symbolic support of state authority. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a group of new gentry initiated the long process of political and social integration in this once “barbaric” region.

Since the nineteenth century, another important force that transformed the local society in Pingnan was the trend of integration into the regional and the global markets. The economic order was restored during the era of reconstruction and a prosperous land market soon appeared since the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ During the mid- and the late nineteenth century, under the pressure from western countries, two ports in the

¹⁶ For the influence of new county on local society, also see Aoyama Ichirō's 青山一郎 study on the establishment of Ningyang 寧洋 county in western Fujian during the Ming. See Aoyama Ichirō, “Mindai no shinken setchi to chiiki shakai: Fukken Shōshū-hu Neiyō-ken no baai 明代の新県設置と地域社会: 福建漳州府寧洋県の場合,” *Shigaku zasshi* 101-2(1992): 82-108.

¹⁷ In his famous analysis of Fujian macroeconomic cycle, William Skinner claims that the “dark age” of Fujian economy “was only ended in the 1840s” after the opening of treaty ports. However, in my observation, the market economy, at least in Pingnan, had revived no later than the mid-eighteenth century. See G. William Skinner, “Presidential Address: The Structure of Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 44.2(1985): 271-292.

northeastern Fujian coast , Fuzhou and Sanduao 三都澳, were opened to foreign trade, and Pingnan valleys soon became the bases of tea production. Following this trend, local families started to participate in inter-county, inter-province, or even international business. The mobility of people, goods and currencies increased, and in the late nineteenth century, some Pingnan villagers started to migrate to southeastern Asia looking for a better chance of life.¹⁸

From social, political to economic realms, there was a great transformation in northern Gutian from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. A new stratum of gentry appeared. They led local affairs and brought in new values. A new county government was established, and a group of imperially appointed officials and clerks were transplanted into this marginal society. The thriving regional and global markets also reached to these valleys, and changed villagers' material life. These forces intertwined together, transformed both the social structure and the cultural landscape of Pingnan, and made the textual production quite distinct to that of previous era.

The Proliferation of Texts

During the same period of the reconstruction and integration, the numbers of extant written texts also started to increase, and reached a peak in the nineteenth century. While earlier texts certainly had less chance to survive, especially through the turbulent seventeenth century, the texts produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also suffered from considerable turbulences. First, the turmoil of warlords during the early

¹⁸ They started to work in the rubber plantation in Sarawak, Malaysia and gradually settled there.

Republic period, which was no less violent than the previous transitory chaos, and then the extremely destructive Cultural Revolution in the twentieth century, in which the destruction of historical written texts was systematic. The fact that a large number of texts from this period still survive today suggests that there was a significant increase in the number of local texts produced since the late seventeenth century.

In addition to the increase in the number of texts, several features of these surviving texts also suggest an essential change in the textual production in this region. First, geographically, not only in the county seat and a few of market towns, but in all the villages that I surveyed nearly all have written texts that survived and most of these surviving texts date from no later than the nineteenth century; this is true even for smaller mountain villages with fewer households. For texts dating from the earlier period, I could only find examples associated with several leading lineages; by contrast, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, written texts prevailed and there are examples associated with almost every corner of Pingnan County.

Second, although some genres of texts are more formalized than others, the quality of surviving texts varies. Some texts were delicately composed and carefully written, such as a genealogy compiled by a degree-holder, but there are also texts that are poorly composed and written on low-quality paper. The varied quality suggests that the use of texts reached to different social strata, even to the lower level of society whose members were not equipped with proficient literary skills.

Third, more genres of texts were found from the eighteenth century. In addition to lineage documents, stone inscriptions, contracts, and ritual manuals, all of which are the focus of the following chapters, other genres, such as account books, public

announcements, personal notes, literary writings, and printed books, can also be found in Pingnan during this period. This proliferation of genres implies the penetration of written texts into different realms of the daily life of villagers.

Fourth, even among texts that can be categorized into the same genre are very different in terms of content and form. Although, as a vehicle of communication, the tendency toward standardization is an important component in textual composition, variations were constantly created in textual practices. This tendency toward diversification was the result of a rooted culture of texts, in which local people, building on existing patterns, were capable of creating their own texts to fulfill their own needs.

The proliferation, prevalence, and diversity of texts in Pingnan mark a further generalization of textual practices. Written, printed, and carved texts were used in different realms of social life, and villagers recognized their effects. As the previous chapters show, written texts had played an important role in social organization and official administration during the Ming dynasty in this region. From the eighteenth century, texts were used in more occasions and by a lower stratum of the population. Literate or not, villagers were used to encountering written texts in their quotidian lives and accustomed to the role that texts played. To fully illustrate the penetration of textual practices and its historical significance, it is necessary to read these texts in relation to others in their genre and place them in the context of local history.

In the following four chapters, I examine the use of four different kinds of texts in Pingnan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 1. genealogies and lineage documents, 2. inscriptions and other texts for public display, 3. contracts, account books and other texts used in economic activities and 4. ritual texts. These four kinds of texts

roughly corresponded to four realms of village life. Genealogies were important textual compositions to organize lineage groups in late imperial China, and its history in Pingnan can be traced to the fourteenth century. However, it was only in the last two hundred years of imperial China that genealogies became prevalent in most villages in Pingnan. Together with various kinds of documents compiled for lineage organizations, these lineage documents became an important part in organizing the social lives of villagers. Stone inscriptions also had a very long history in China, and could also be traced to the Southern Song dynasty in Pingnan. However, it was only after the establishment of Pingnan County that stone inscriptions became popular and could be seen in many different corners in Pingnan. Stone inscriptions and other texts were intended to be openly displayed, and their political significance dates to the beginning of their prevalence. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, more texts were publicly displayed in Pingnan, and they became a crucial component of public space in both the county seat and in the villages.

In the field of Chinese economic history, numerous contracts provide one of the most valuable types of original materials for understanding economic concepts and the activities of economic exchanges. In my survey of Pingnan, among more than one thousands contracts compiled in the late imperial period that I collected, most are from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition to contracts, many other textual materials were also involved in villagers' economic lives, and their presence shows how the economic structure in northeastern Fujian evolved. Finally, texts used in rituals are the last group of texts that I consider. The daily life of villagers was closely related to various kinds of rituals: calendric rites, communal rituals, rites of passage, and rites of affliction. These rituals were mostly highly textualized and performed by ritual specialists with literary

skills. The ritual texts preserved in Pingnan from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exemplify the ritualistic use of texts in Chinese villages.

Chapter 4

Society: Gentry and the Penetration of Written Genealogy

Historians realized the value of Chinese genealogies early. Among various kinds of documents one can collect in villages, genealogies are usually the most informative ones. Scholars of social history are particularly interested in genealogies, since genealogies cover the most essential aspects of a local community: its people and their organizations. In southern China where single-surname villages are prevalent, genealogies become the most comprehensive account of village history. Although some genealogies, especially those of elite families, might be preserved in earlier private or public collections, systematic collection of Chinese genealogies began only in the early twentieth century as scholars and librarians developed an interest in these documents. In his lecture notes published in 1920s, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) highlighted the value of genealogies as the most important material in the study of lineage organizations and demography in Chinese history. He suggested a national library to collect genealogies all over the country. A Guangdong native who must be familiar with local genealogy compilation, Liang emphasized that “every village and every family in our country has genealogies. These genealogies would be the treasures of historical research.”¹

Since the 1930s, scholars started to use genealogies as primary sources for historical research. In the early stage, scholars used genealogies in three approaches. Following a

¹ See Liang Qichao, *Zhongguo jin sanbai nian xueshu shi* 中國近三百年學術史 in *Liang Qichao lun Qingxue shi langzhong* 梁啟超論清學史兩種 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue, 1985), 479-480.

rather traditional perspective, some scholars took genealogical materials as supplemental sources to official histories and local gazetteers, revealing information on historical topics they were interested in. Many of them were particularly interested in using the many family histories narrated in genealogies to trace the migration history of specific social or ethnic groups.² In addition to family histories, some other scholars paid attention to the genealogical records of birth and marriage, and used them as raw materials for demographic or sociological studies. Many of them were Chinese scholars who had studies abroad and received their initial training as social or biological scientists.³ Another group of scholars took genealogies as the primary sources to understand the patterns of Chinese families and lineage organizations. In addition to family histories and family records, they paid much attention to the lineage admonishments, regulations and agreements recorded in genealogies. To them, these documents are the essential parts for the operation of lineage organizations. In the early stage, many of these studies were initiated by Japanese scholars who were keen to discover the general principles of Chinese society for political or

² For example, Luo Xianglin 羅香林 is regarded as the founder of modern genealogical studies in China. His interests in genealogies came from his early studies of the families of Sun Yat-sen and Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 in the 1930s. The significance of genealogies to him is a new kind of primary source that discloses new historical facts. See Luo Xianglin, "Zhongguo zupu yanjiu zhi shixue yiyi 中國族譜研究之史學意義," *Zhongguo zupu yanjiu* 中國族譜研究 (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongguo xueshe, 1971), 1-16. He was also the earliest scholar to use genealogical materials to study the migration of Hakka people, garrison soldiers, Chinese Muslims, and Chinese Christians. See Luo Xianglin, *Kejia yuanliu kao* 客家源流考 (Hong Kong: shijie keshu di er ci kenqin dahui choubai weiyuanhui, 1973), Luo Xianglin, "Zupu suojian Ming-dai weisuo yu guomin qianyi zhi guanxi 族譜所見明代衛所與國民遷移之關係," *Zhongguo zupu yanjiu*, 75-102, and several articles in this collected essay.

³ During the 1930s, Pan Guangdan 潘光旦, a sociologist and eugenicist trained in Columbia University, used genealogical records to study the composition of local elites near Shanghai. See Pan Guangdan, *Ming-Qing liangdai Jiaxing de wangzu* 明清兩代嘉興的望族 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1947). Yuan Yijin 袁貽瑾, a bio-statistician trained in John Hopkins University, used genealogies in the studies of Chinese demography. I-Chin, Yuan, "Life Tables for a Southern Chinese Family from 1365 to 1849," *Human Biology* 3:2(1931): 157-179.

intellectual purposes.⁴ These approaches and the researchers' interests in family histories, family records and lineage regulations were inherited by post-war scholars who continued to explore the structure of Chinese society with genealogical materials.⁵

At the same time, some other scholars, instead of taking genealogies as the raw records of historical facts, pay more attention on the texts and their production, examining the constructive nature of genealogical texts. Suspicion of the credibility of genealogical records had arisen soon after the popularization of this genre during the Song dynasty and this issue had remained problematic for scholars.⁶ In 1941, after exploring the role of genealogies in lineage organization by reading the genealogies in Japanese libraries, Makino Tatsumi 牧野巽 came to visit Guangdong for his studies of Chinese lineages. After this first visit to China, he wrote several articles on the extended lineage organizations in the Pearl River Delta and concluded that extended genealogies and union shrines served as the foundation of fictive kinship among surname groups whose blood relationships were not certain.⁷ In other words, instead of taking genealogies as a neutral

⁴ Makino Tatsumi 牧野巽(1905-1974) started his studies of Chinese lineages and genealogies in 1930s, and came to Guangdong in 1940s. Following this step, Taga Akigorō 多賀秋五郎(1912-1990) published an analytical catalogue of Chinese genealogies in 1960. See Makino Tatsumi, *Kinsei Chūgoku sōzoku kenkyū* 近世中國宗族研究(Tōkyō: Nikko Shoin, 1949) and Taga, Akigorō, *Sōfu no kenkyū. Shiryō hen* 宗譜の研究：資料編(Tōkyō: Tōyō Bunko, 1960).

⁵ Using family histories as a source to trace the historical origin of migration is still very popular among scholars and genealogists now. For example, Hugh Clark used the family histories told in genealogies to trace the migration history of Putian elite families. See Hugh Clark, *Portrait of a Community*. Another trend to use genealogies as the primary sources for Chinese demographic studies started from the late 1970s and 1980s, mainly by American scholars or scholars trained in the US. See Liu Ts'ui-jung 劉翠溶, "Chinese Genealogies as a Source for the Study of Historical Demography" in *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan chengli wushi zhounian jinian lunwenji* 中央研究院成立五十週年紀念論文集(Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1978), 849-870, and Ted A. Telford, "Survey of Social Demographic Data in Chinese Genealogies," *Late Imperial China* 7:2(1986), 118-148.

⁶ See the comments quoted in Morita, "Sō-gen jidai ni okeru shūfu 宋元時代にこける修譜," 510.

⁷ Makino Tatsumi, "Kanton gōzokushi to gōzokufu 廣東合族祠と合族譜," in *Makino Tatsumi chosakushū* 牧野巽著作集 vol.6 (Tōkyō: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1985).

representation of lineage organizations, he started to examine the constructiveness of genealogies and its significance to lineage formation.

In a further step, based on previous studies and fieldworks in southern China, English anthropologist Maurice Freedman tried to provide a general framework of lineage society. In his *Chinese Lineage and Society* published in 1966, he unfolded the complexity of genealogical records by claiming that a genealogy “is a set of claims to origin and relationships, a charter, a map of dispersion, a framework for wide-ranging social organization, a blueprint for action. It is a political statement — and therefore a perfect subject for the anthropologist.”⁸ This oft-quoted passage, instead of taking genealogies as passive records of historical past, emphasized the function of a genealogy as a “charter” and a “statement” and highlighted its connection to the current lineage organization for which a genealogy is produced. In addition to the question of “what can the content of genealogies tell us about the principles of Chinese society?”, a new question was raised: What does the compilation of genealogies mean to the formation of Chinese society?

Although Freedman’s main purpose was to emphasize the importance of written genealogies to the sociological and anthropological studies of current Chinese society, in the following decades his view influenced historians of Chinese society, who continued to explore the “political agenda” behind genealogies in history, or more fundamentally, the “textuality” of Chinese genealogy. However, while most historians agree that genealogy compilation was an important device for lineage building, they emphasize different aspects of its significance according to their view of Chinese lineages and society. A popular view takes genealogy compilation as a practice to construct a lineage after the orthodoxy model

⁸ Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: Athlone P, 1966), 31.

endorsed by the state, and puts it into the historical context of the diffusion of Neo-Confucianism to local society since the Song dynasty.⁹ This assumption basically follows the Neo-Confucian rhetoric adopted in many genealogies and emphasizes the role of gentry and scholars who actively advocated the ideal model of Confucian society. Echoing the general image of gentry society, this view is not only held by modern scholars, but also popular among genealogists and local people who appreciated the value of genealogies.

Not satisfied with this top-down pattern, another group of historians examine the significance of genealogy compilation from the context of regional and organizational development. This group of historians tends to emphasize the agency of local people and explores the reasons that local people adopt the form of genealogy to organize themselves. They do not regard the practice of genealogy compilation as a unidirectional imposition but take it as a process of negotiation among several different agents in local society. In order to clarify this process, researchers have to look closer to the local context and study the relationships among these agents. For example, tracing a common ancestor to a historical high official in the central plain is a prevalent pattern of genealogy compilation in southern China. While a popular explanation takes it as an attempt to make connection to the political and cultural core of the empire, its local practice might have different meanings depending on the strategies of local people. It could be an effort to include wider memberships and solidify dispersing communities, to qualify to an established entity and attach to a stronger power, or to make distinction to the neighbors or conversely to join in

⁹ For a typical explanation of Neo-Confucian penetration, see Chen, *Fujian zupu*, 6-10. This view can also be found in Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," 16-61.

the network of their prestigious neighbors. Of course, it could also be that they just simply followed an existing literary cliché and copy the only available text.¹⁰ In other words, instead of following an orthodox model, what matters for historians is how local people appropriate a popular form to satisfy their local need. The different aspects emphasized in these two patterns originate from their different views toward the general trend in late imperial China: the integration of myriad localities into a centralized state through different channels, or the invention of diversified localities under a loose frame of the empire.

Based on previous debates, this chapter attempts to explore this issue of genealogy compilation from the aspect of dissemination and mutual construction. Most studies on genealogies and genealogy compilation concentrate on reading the texts from a single genealogy or from genealogies of a single lineage organization. Although the localist approach tends to emphasize “local context,” this context is difficult to be fully examined by investigating the genealogical texts from a single source. Not only did local communities in the same region not adopt the genre of genealogy at the same time, but also they adopt it under different circumstances with different considerations. The communities in the same region might have different cultural resources and develop different strategies to compile their own genealogy. Moreover, if we examine the textual production of genealogies, it is clear that no genealogy is compiled independently without referencing other genealogies, lineage documents or other genres of texts. Genealogists did not invent their own genealogies, but learnt it from others: this “other” could come from outside their

¹⁰ For some of these cases, see Faure, “The Lineage as a Cultural Invention,” 4-36; Liu, “Zuxian puxi de chonggou jiqi yiyi”; Szonyi, *Practicing Kingship*.

locales, from the same neighborhood, or from previous periods. In order to better understand the local adaption of genealogical form, putting a genealogy back to its local context is not enough. It is necessary to understand the overall interactions among the genealogical productions on a larger scale.

In this chapter, I start with the revival of genealogical compilation in Pingnan and its historical circumstances during the eighteenth century, and proceed to trace the penetration of this practice in different social layers during the following decades.

Early Eighteenth Century:

State Policy and the Revival of Lineage Building

From the mid-Ming on, lineage organization gradually became the basic social unit in local society. Official *lijia* systems almost fell out of use; instead, negotiations among the leaders of the major lineages decided issues regarding local affairs and the distribution of official duties—taxes and labor services. Unlike the Hongwu emperor who attempted to invent a new institution, the Qing emperors by and large followed the system of local governance of the previous dynasty and did not try to impose a new institution on local societies at the beginning of the Qing dynasty. However, in the 1690s, the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang initiated a new tax policy, “allocating tax households to the descent line” (*lianghu guizong* 糧戶歸宗). Under this system, households were rearranged according to lineage; and then taxes and labor service were

allocated according to lineage-based households. Instead of community heads, lineage chiefs were responsible for collecting taxes and providing labor services.¹¹

This policy was promulgated to amend the dysfunctional system of *lijia*, which was established more than three hundred years ago. It officially admitted the *de facto* dominance of lineage organization in local society in southeastern China. Following this trend, lineages and lineage chiefs (*zuzhang* 族長) replaced communities and community heads and gained more autonomy in managing local affairs. They also directly communicated with officials and clerks in local governments without having to use community heads as secondary middlemen. From the perspective of local government, this was possibly the best way to guarantee a steady flow of tax income and labor service from local populations during the reconstruction era. For local populations, given that lineage as a basic social unit was officially recognized by the local government, this initiated a new trend of lineage building in southeastern China. Lineage members living in different locations—and even people sharing the same surname who had no previous genealogical connection—affiliated as a single registered household; registered households represented these groups of people to the local government and determined their sharing of official duties and legal rights. In a few cases, in order to compete with strong lineages, people organized themselves under a single registered household, even though they had different surnames.¹² In this way, three kinds of social units—territorial, official-administrative, and kinship—were merged into one as the name of lineage. In this “contractual lineage,”

¹¹ Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*, 230–231; Liu Yonghua 劉永華 and Zheng Rong 鄭榕, “Qingchu Zhongguo dongnan diqu de lianghu guizong gaige: laizi Minnan de lizheng 清初中國東南地區的糧戶歸宗改革：來自閩南的例證,” *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* 4 (2008), 81–87.

¹² Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*, 231–235.

consanguinity was not the only criterion formalizing a lineage organization; rather, “mutual agreement” became the most important connection keeping people together.¹³

In this context, mutual agreement became the key in the formation of contractual lineage and its perpetuation—regardless of whether “lineage” members were residentially dispersed, were not previously connected, or lacked any consanguineal relationship. Mutual agreements were mostly made in the form of written contracts that crystalized the members’ relationships as a formal lineage group. These contracts usually were copied into their common genealogy or were written on a stone stele to provide long-lasting, effective evidence. In many cases, an adjusted descent line supported with a new genealogy was created to establish all the included members as descendants of the same ancestor. Different groups of people were usually organized as branches under an inclusive descent system, and the members of each branch and their obligations were negotiated and eventually recorded in writing. As I discussed in previous chapters, this was not the first time that the formation of a lineage relied on various texts; however, the tax policy during this period made it the prevailing practice in southeastern China, including northern Gutian.

Under these circumstances, the Jixia Gans started to rebuild their lineage during the reconstruction era. It was claimed in their genealogy that the Jixia Gans moved from southern Zhejiang in the 1430s; however their genealogy does not disclose their identities as migrant miners—or “miner-bandits” in the words of the Ming officials.¹⁴ Except for some oral stories implying their martial character, the early history of this group of people

¹³ For “contractual lineage,” see Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*, 122–142.

¹⁴ For the ancestors of the Gan family as miner-bandits, see note 62, Chapter 3.

is almost blank.¹⁵ During the late Ming, they gained a registered household, rose to local power, and took charge of several official services, including collecting the taxes of their community and providing labor service to the county government.¹⁶ Although the Gan family claimed that their first genealogy since they migrated to northern Gutian was instantly compiled by the second son of their founding ancestor, the only evidence supporting this claim was two unreliable prefaces supposedly left by him.¹⁷

It was not until 1717 while local order was being rebuilt under a new regime, that the Jixia Gans compiled the descent line of their lineage with the agreement of the chiefs of the four branches. In this agreement, the names of members of the four branches and their turns to take responsibility for the ritual of ancestral worship were documented, as was the descent line of their lineage to their early ancestors. This agreement to formalize a ritual claimed to be set up by their great-great grandfather is the earliest record of the lineage activities of the Gans in this region. From 1730 to 1735, one of their lineage members, Gan Yuanfu 甘元膚, continued to compile the first formal genealogy of the Gans. These two texts organized the Jixia Gans into four branches sharing a common ancestor, and

¹⁵ In one story, their founding ancestor started to build the walls around their settlement when they arrived in Jixia, but neighboring surname members accused them of rebellion. Their founding ancestor was arrested by the county magistrate. Thanks to the eloquence of his second son, the father was released, but they were prevented from building the wall around their settlement. Members of the strongest branch of the Gans claim to be descendants of this second son. According to another story explaining the rise of the Gans, one of their ancestors was smart and brave. After being captured by pirates while traveling, he pretended to cooperate with them. Eventually he was taken to the pirates' base, and was cunning enough not only to escape but also to bring home the pirates' silver. Because of this adventure, the Jixia Gans became one of the richest families in northern Gutian. The first story attests to their initial conflicts with native residents and even with the local government, and their self-defensive efforts under violent circumstances. The second story implies that the rise of this family was associated with cooperation with "bandits," rather than anything to do with farming, which was more typically claimed; that is, silver from doubtful sources promoted their status—not hard and honest work.

¹⁶ *Bohai-jun Gan-shi zupu*, 24.

¹⁷ These two prefaces are dated as 1480 and 1533, and both claim the first genealogy compiler as their author; this would mean the compiler wrote a preface in 1480 and wrote another one fifty-three years later—that would have been quite unusual and is doubtful. *Ibid.*, 24 and 26.

systematically organized their kinship relationships. According to Gan Yuanfu's son, who continued his father's mission to revise their genealogy, "while he [Gan Yuanfu] was compiling the genealogy during his lifetime, he was not afraid of the complicity of the names and relationships of so many ancestors in our lineage, and the difficulty of collecting the information from every possible source. He began with his great-grandfather and grandfather to our earliest ancestors, clarifying every detail of our origins."¹⁸ This description implies that before Gan Yuanfu, the "relationships and names" of their ancestor to the earliest one were not clear, and it was Gan Yuanfu who diligently "recovered" their ancestral history. This first rational genealogical line built in the early eighteenth century was commonly accepted by the Gan family afterward and taken as the standard version of later lineage documents. By producing new textual materials, the retrospective efforts of Gan Yuanfu to construct their family history and lineage division were reified and able to transmit to next generations.

The Jixia Gans certainly was not the only descent group who attempted to reorganize themselves by compiling a genealogy in the early eighteenth century. Claiming that their old genealogy was burnt during the chaos of dynastic transition in the mid-seventeenth century, the Changqiao Baos 長橋包氏 compiled their genealogy in 1727 after they hired an affinal relative as their family tutor. The compiler of the genealogy of the Bao family asked for this affinal relative's help in sifting through surviving documents and the information from elders in lineage.¹⁹ The organizer claimed that after reading *The Detailed Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror* 通鑑綱目 (*Tongjian gangmu*), a popular

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ *Changqiao cunshi Bao-shi zongpu* 長橋村史包氏宗譜, 5–6.

abridged version of the Chinese history, he realized that just as a nation has to have a history, a lineage also has to have its own genealogy. This is also the same rhetoric that Gan Yuanfu used to explain his intention to compile a genealogy.²⁰ Both the Baos' and the Gans' efforts marked the response to a stabilizing society, and the reconstruction started from returning to an imagined lineage order. Both compiled their genealogies with surviving lineage documents, and retold their family history.

Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: New Gentry and the Compilation of Genealogies

A few descent groups in northern Gutian had started to build their lineage organizations and to produce textual agreements, and some of them had constructed their genealogical lines in the early eighteenth century; but overall, the practices of genealogy compiling only prevailed from the late eighteenth century—several years after the establishment of Pingnan County in 1734. The presence of a new local government not only enhanced the official administration but also remodeled the structure of local power. After the establishment of the new county, the most obvious change was the formation of a gentry stratum whose members participated in civil examinations and cooperated with the county government on local affairs.

Except for a few who earned their degrees after moving to the county seat,²¹ there were no degree-holders—even of the lowest degree of government student—in northern

²⁰ Ibid, and *Bohai-jun Gan-shi zupu*, 27.

²¹ The Ruiyun Yaos mentioned in the Chapter 3 is one example. One branch of their family members became a government student two generations after they moved to the county seat.

Gutian before it was separated from Gutian County. The situation was captured in a rather exaggerated description by a local official: “The thirteen sectors that are separated [from Gutian County] to make the Pingnan County are all mountains. People rarely go there, and, over the course of their entire lives, residents there never go to the county seat either. Therefore, for hundreds of years, no one’s name has been listed in the State School.”²² Since candidates had to take the civil examinations in the county seat, this paragraph implies residents in the northern Gutian barely took the examinations. While this does not mean that people in northern Gutian were illiterate or that they did not have access to the Confucian classics and other written texts, it does suggest that they could not compete with the people in southern Gutian, who had a long tradition of taking civil examinations, built a social network, and had held official appointments since the Song dynasty. However, a new county would mean that there would be a new quota for government students for this county; this provided a new field for powerful local families to promote themselves and compete with one another.

A controversy right after the establishment of Pingnan County shows how the local population valued this new source of power. Before the separation, Gutian could select twelve government students in each county examination. After the establishment of Pingnan County, four extra were added, and eight each were assigned to Pingnan and Gutian. However, Gutian had many more candidates than Pingnan, and they were also more competitive than those from Pingnan. When Pingnan County was established, knowing that the Pingnan candidates would not stand a chance, local gentry in Gutian suggested that Gutian candidates could also take the examination in Pingnan and shared

²² *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 188.

their quota of eight. This proposal was accepted by the acting County Magistrate of Pingnan, who were assigned to this post from his position as the County Magistrate of Gutian and apparently had good relationships with local elites in Gutian county seat. Unsurprisingly, the residents of Pingnan were infuriated by this decision, and the candidates in two counties attacked each other and petitioned the new County Magistrate of Pingnan. In the first county examination held in Pingnan in 1736, candidates from Gutian claimed that the former county magistrate's decision had been approved by the Prefect of Fuzhou and attempted to take the examination in Pingnan. Knowing their attempts, several hundred people from the Pingnan county seat and nearby sectors were armed with hoes and other farming tools. They threatened to kill the candidates from Gutian and blocked the gate of the county seat for several days. The locals disbanded only after the county magistrate, Shen Zhong, intervened and promised to separate the Gutian candidates from those from Pingnan.

The low competitiveness of candidates in Pingnan was not the only problem. Since the counties were newly divided, many people who had properties in both counties chose to take the examination in Pingnan, even though most did not ever live in Pingnan. Some of them chose to use their relatives' Pingnan registration for their examination assignment.²³ To settle this conflict, the county magistrate promised to clarify the registration, and divided the candidates into two groups: those who lived in Pingnan and were registered in Pingnan households, and those who did not live in Pingnan but who had a Pingnan household registration. Considering that there were few qualified candidates in Pingnan

²³ See the case of the Fenglin Yangs in Chapter 2. The Yangs chose to move back their registered household in northern Gutian from the county seat and took the civil examinations in Pingnan. Their family members became one of the first government students in Pingnan.

and the quota of four extra government students was added for the separation of two counties, he proposed that each group could share the quota of four government students in Pingnan, so that Gutian candidates could maintain totally the quota of twelve as before and less competitive Pingnan candidates could save at least the quota of four. This temporary settlement was soon overthrown after Pingnan had the first group of government students, who petitioned to the county magistrate to take back all the quota of eight.²⁴

In 1738, together with the special supplementary admission permitted by the emperor, twenty-six candidates passed the civil and military examinations and became the first government students (*shengyuan* 生員) in Pingnan County. Most of these early government students came from the most powerful families in Pingnan, such as the Tangkou Zhous 棠口周氏, the Jitou Zhangs, and the Jixia Gans. Many of these families were local military leaders during the Ming-Qing transition; some of them were even bandits or “rebels.” The establishment of new county government provided them a good chance to amend their relationships with local government, and obtaining an official title from the new county became the first step.

From the late eighteenth century, more and more local people obtained qualifications from the government school in Pingnan. A few of them even passed the provincial examination and went on to earn a further degree: the first provincial graduate (*juren* 舉人) in Pingnan passed the provincial examination in 1792—almost sixty years after the establishment of Pingnan County; the first metropolitan graduate passed the metropolitan examination in 1832.²⁵ Several government students obtained their status by passing

²⁴ Ibid., 187–193.

²⁵ *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi*, 798–799; *Tangkou Zhou-shi zupu* 棠口周氏族譜, 141.

military examinations and were also honored by local people. For example, in 1792, a eulogy was written for placing the tablet of Chen Tianxing 陳天興 into the ancestral shrine of the Guxia Chens for his contribution to the lineage. The title “*yi xiangsheng*” 邑庠生, government student of the County, is associated with him whenever his name appears; by going through other sources, it appears that he earned this status via military examinations.²⁶ Although degrees from civil examinations were valued more highly, it seems that, for many powerful families whose literary foundation was weak, obtaining a degree from military examinations was easier.

These government students from civil and military examinations soon became the leaders of lineages. It might not be official degrees that granted them the status of leaders. Most government students came from families with relatively better economic standing within the lineage; these wealthier families could afford to educate their sons in the Confucian classics and writing eight-legged essays, or the expense of purchasing a title. Many oral stories and anecdotes in genealogies describe efforts to hire famous tutors from Fuzhou. Marriage networks also helped. Tutors who did not come from Fuzhou were often affinal relatives with an official degree, and a powerful family was in a better position to marry their daughter to another powerful family that had succeeded in the civil examinations.²⁷ To local people, the status of government student and higher official degrees had a two-fold significance: on the one hand it opened the way to communicate with official powers. This was very important. Without community heads, lineages had to deal with the local government on their own. While they often had to go through greedy

²⁶ “Yi xiangsheng Tianxing jun shenzhu jinci ji 邑庠生天興君神主進祠記,” *Guxia Chen-shi zupu*, 13.

²⁷ See the case in *Guxia Chen-shi zupu* 古廈陳氏族譜, 15, 66.

clerks, having a member who was a degree-holder gave the lineage a path to negotiate with the local government more directly. On the other hand, an official degree was a political as well as a cultural symbol for claiming superiority over other lineage members or people from other lineages. Not only did members of different lineage groups have to compete for this status symbol, but members in the same lineage group could also promote themselves by getting a degree. From the mid-nineteenth century, it became increasingly common for a lineage leader to purchase an official degree by donation after a member in his lineage passed the examinations and earned a degree. For example, when the descendants of Zhang Buqi 張步齊 in Jitou wrote an agreement to deal with their corporate properties in 1880, each of the three branches selected three representatives to make the deal. Eight of the nine representatives had at least the status of government student, and the remaining one was also qualified to take the county examination. Most of their names were not recorded in the list of degree-holders in local gazetteers; rather, they had obtained their status by donating money or grain to the government.²⁸

With their stronger background within the lineage, their connection to the government, and their literary skill, the activities of these government students and degree-holders were central to lineage building during this period. They participated in—or led—the establishment and the reconstruction of the ancestral shrine. They reorganized the ritual of ancestral worship and made the written rules for the performance of the ritual and the maintenance of shrine. They also rebuilt the graves of distinguished

²⁸ “Buqi Zhanggong hao Lühou gongjigucang zugu yuanchu-rucun qingce 步齊公號履侯公積穀倉租穀原出入存清冊.”

ancestors and honored their achievements with well-written eulogies carved on stone stelae. More and more lineage documents—such as documents of family division, registers of ancestral worship, and various written agreements within lineage—were compiled and signed by government students and degree-holders in the lineages during the nineteenth century.

Through preparing for the civil examinations, mastering the skills of manipulating textual materials, and, traveling back and forth to take the higher examination, these government students were exposed to new formats and new concepts. Once again, the Jixia Gans set a good example. Since the establishment of Pingnan County, the Gan family was zealous in sending their talented young men to take the civil and military examinations. In 1770, when traveling to take the provincial examination in Fuzhou, Gan Yuanfu's son, Gan Hengyong 甘亨勇, who was a stipend student (*lingsheng* 廩生) at the time, learned from the genealogies of the major families in Fuzhou that genealogies should be revised every thirty years. Accepting the advice of a lineage elder, he revised the genealogy left by his father. Although at the time, Gan Hengyong had married into his wife's family and no longer lived in Jixia, he revised the genealogy, and emphasized in the preface the importance of having a written genealogy to connect dispersed lineage members residing in different locations.²⁹

These lineages with degree-holders also started to compile or revise their own genealogies on the basis of these lineage documents. Although most villages claimed to have a long tradition of genealogy compilation, most of the villages started to have their first formally written genealogy in the nineteenth century. Many genealogists, instead of

²⁹ *Bohai Gan-shi zupu*, 28–29.

compiling a new genealogy, claimed to revive or continue a genealogy tradition started during the Ming, or even the Song dynasty. When Gan Yuanfu compiled the first genealogy of the Gan of Jixa in 1730s, he claimed to continue their genealogy that had been compiled two hundred and fifty years earlier. When the Gan's genealogy was revised in 1814 by the genealogist Gan Xingbang 甘興邦, who was a government student and family tutor, he further traced their genealogical tradition back to 1146 (Chart 5). He included a preface allegedly written by an ancestor ten generations before they moved to Fujian. In this short preface, the author claimed that although he was not able to provide a genealogy that included all the lineage members throughout history, he had, nevertheless, recorded all that could be found in the histories into a coherent genealogical line. This allegedly author in 1146 asserted that their ancestor was a high minister during the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 BC–c. 1046 BC), provided a history that included more than two thousand years of the Gan lineage, and placed himself as the seventy-first generation following the original ancestor from this high minister.³⁰ Gan Xingbang used this material, the source of which is unknown, to connect his family to the grand narration of history, just as the Ruiyun Yaos had done in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. What Gan Xingbang revived was not their genealogical tradition in the twelve century, but the practice of reconstructing early family history by fabricating textual materials, which was once popular during the late Ming.

³⁰ *Bohai Gan-shi zupu*, 24, 25, 31–32.

Chart 5 Succession of the editions of the Gan Genealogies in Jixia, buildt in the 2010 edition

| Year | Gen. | Compiler | Note |
|------|------|-------------------|--|
| 1 | 1146 | 71st Gan Zibo | Preface was added into the genealogy in the fifth revision |
| 2 | 1480 | 81st Gan Siyu | Preface was added into the genealogy in the third revision |
| 3 | 1730 | 87th Gan Yuanfu | First genealogy in Jixia |
| 4 | 1771 | 88th Gan Hengyong | First revision by a government student |
| 5 | 1814 | 91th Gan Xingbang | Tracing family history to the Shang |
| 6 | 1889 | 94th Gan Yurun | Including other Gan villages in Pingnan |
| 7 | 1915 | 94th Gan Xieding | Including “Lineage Regulations” |
| 8 | 1992 | 95th Gan Yichun | First genealogy after the Cultural Revolution |
| 9 | 2010 | 95th Gan Naixun | Linking to other Gan lineages over the world |

This trend was popular among the new gentry in Pingnan during the early nineteenth century. In 1827, the Guxia Chens 古廈陳氏 claimed to base their new genealogy on a draft that their ancestor had compiled in 1629, although they also claimed this genealogy was burnt and nothing was left other than a brief preface.³¹ While compiling a formal genealogy was in fact a new practice to many local genealogists, they tried to persuade themselves and others that they were continuing a long cultural tradition that went back several hundred years—even though they learned the format of genealogy from their contemporaries. These genealogists, mostly trained as candidates for civil examinations, learned how to look for, or invent, textual evidence to support their assertions, and greatly expanded the scale of Pingnan genealogies. During the late Ming, only a few distinguished families had the ability to compile a formal genealogy—even the Ruiyun Yaos were helped

³¹ *Guxia Chen-shi zupu*, 2.

by a tutor from Fuqing; in the early nineteenth century, with so many well-trained candidates of civil examinations, genealogy compilation became a fashion widely shared by local families.

The general composition of the genealogies during this period and their goals were not strikingly different from those of the genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos in the fifteenth century. By editing textual evidence of various kinds, they all tried to trace the origins of their ancestors as early as possible and place their lineages in a general historical framework. They all tried to promote the status of their lineages by rewriting their ancestors' history; at the same time, they tried to clarify the relationships among lineage members by declaring a reasonable system of descent line. However, during the late Ming, the Ruiyun Yaos compiled their genealogy to fit into the elite network in the county seat of Gutian, but in the nineteenth century, Pingnan gentry families were creating their own network. In this new county, the imperative to compile a genealogy started to spread among gentrified families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most of these families had not been previously recorded in any textual materials and their rise was fueled by their military forces during the transition period. After they obtained legitimate status via examinations, they subsequently attempted to build up their cultural image. They learned the concepts of genealogy from each other or by traveling to the county seat or provincial capital. By the mid-nineteenth century, almost all the major families in Pingnan had a genealogy of their own. With many families trying to rebuild their social and cultural connections during such a short period, competitions and coalitions among them were inevitable. Their dual intentions of competition and coalition can be observed in their enthusiasm to complete their genealogies and to join the community of local elites; as a

genealogist/government student announced in a preface: “Every distinguished family should have a genealogy.”³²

This attitude is well illustrated in the compilation of the genealogy of the Chen family in the early nineteenth century. In 1827, a group of government students and tribute students from the Guxia Chens eventually completed the Chen family genealogy. In addition to their family tutor from Fuzhou, they also invited a Tribute Student from the neighboring Jitou Zhangs to write a preface for them. In this preface, the gentleman from Jitou praises the efforts of these compilers in Guxia, their effective cooperation and labor division, and their knowledge of both the details of their own origin and the format of the genealogy. He also describes the Guxia Chens as a “distinguished lineage of Our Pingnan.” (吾屏名族) Since the time of their settlement, they were famous for their wealth and population, and all their lineage members had the ambition to participate in the civil examinations and became literati. Following the rise of their literary reputation, these gentlemen took “compiling the genealogy” as a necessity, and eventually achieved this goal. As a neighbor lineage, he was more than willing to celebrate the completion of their genealogy, and wrote a preface for them.³³ This narration illustrates not only a typical transition from economic capital to cultural capital, which was materialized by the completion of a fine genealogy, but also the mutual recognition between two powerful families under the identity of “distinguished lineages in Our Pingnan”—the previously uncivilized part of Gutian. This genealogy was created not only for their own lineage members, but also as a means for entering the network of local cultural elites in the making.

³² Zhang Qinmeng 張欽孟, “Chongxiu Guxia Chenshi zongpu xu 重修古廈陳氏宗譜序,” *Guxia Chen-shi zupu*, 3.

³³ Ibid.

Nineteenth Century:

Further Penetration of Genealogy Compilation

As formally written genealogies became the norm among powerful lineages in Pingnan in the mid-nineteenth century, at least three patterns accelerated the spread of genealogy compilation practices to other groups of people. According to their different power relationships and cultural resources, villages responded differently to this trend and produced different types of genealogy. I use three different cases to present these patterns. In the case of the Gans, a dominant surname group introduced this textual practice to minor surname groups. In the case of the Zhangs, genealogies were compiled under the competitions of several surname groups. In the case of the Lans, minor surname group copied this practice within their limited resources.

The Jixia Gans, Menli and Xiaoliyang

In order to stress their prestigious status within lineages, major families with proper literary skills attempted to compile genealogies that included all the lineage members in the Pingnan region; thus, they tried their best to place everyone with the same surname into their family tree. In the process, less prestigious groups with the same surname in smaller villages were merged with the textual construction of major families and introduced to the tradition of genealogy compilation. Proud of being able to provide textual evidence of their status as the earliest settlers, the Jixia Gans was particularly enthusiastic about connecting groups with the same surname in Pingnan. In 1889, the genealogist, a government student by the name of Gan Yurun 甘雨潤, revised the Gan genealogy that had been compiled

seventy-five years earlier. His greatest contribution, as he stated in the preface, was to collect materials from Xiaoliyang 小梨洋, Bandou 板兜, Yangtouzhai 洋頭寨 and other villages where Gan was the dominant surname, and integrate them into the general genealogy of the Gan with settlers in Jixia as the progenitors.³⁴ For example, Xiaoliyang was a minor village close to Jixia with fewer textual records. The Gan family in Xiaoliyang claimed to have an “old genealogy”; in this case, this might have been simply a chart of descent lines or ritual registers used in ancestral worship. In 1889, Gan Yurun came to their village and negotiated with the elders. He edited and corrected their “old genealogy” according to his general scheme. The Gan of Xiaoliyang soon accepted the “branch genealogy” that Gan Yurun compiled for them as their own genealogy. This branch genealogy was basically the same as the Jixia compilation, with only minor adjustments in the prefaces.³⁵ By accepting this arrangement, the records of the Gan of Xiaoliyang were completely merged with the textual compilation of Jixia.

Importantly, the literary levels in each village varied and as did their abilities to accept the texts from other villages. Menli 門裡 is a village in the west part of Pingnan and far from Jixia. Several Gan residents there had obtained the status of government student in the 1850s, and some purchased further degrees by donation. These degree-holders had compiled their own genealogy in 1866.³⁶ The Menli genealogy apparently consulted the genealogy previously compiled in Jixia and shared similar content. The twelfth-century preface that Jixia included in their genealogy in 1814 is also included in the Menli

³⁴ *Bohai Gan-shi zupu*, 31–32.

³⁵ *Xiaoliyang Gan-shi zipu* 小梨洋甘氏支譜, 2.

³⁶ *Menli Gan-shi jiapu* 門裡甘氏家譜.

genealogy with some minor differences. In addition to descent lines and prefaces, the Menli Gans, who had been active in the network of local elites, added several obituaries written by other local literati into their genealogy to promote their cultural image. In 1889, when Gan Yurun attempted to compile an extensive genealogy, the Menli genealogical line was also integrated into the Jixia genealogy, but many Menli materials, such as the obituaries, were not included in this Jixia new genealogy. It should be because the Jixia compiler did not want these Menli decorations to surpass the leading status of Jixia. The Menli Gans still kept their own genealogy. Although they clearly declared that their ancestor came from Jixia, they did not adopt the comprehensive genealogy compiled by Gan Yurun, but made their own a “branch genealogy” in its title.

However, the connection among the Gan families in several villages in Pingnan was not made by this genealogy from 1889, but existed before. When the Temple of the Lady Ma in Jixia was renovated in 1842, several Gan families in different villages donated funds and the Menli Gans even played an important role in managing the renovation.³⁷ What the 1889 genealogy attempted to do was to construct a textual basis upon existing connections. With this effort, villages with fewer cultural resources, such as Xiaoliyang and Yangtouzhai, were completely endowed with the textual tradition of a village with more cultural resources, though some with their own cultural heritage, such as Menli, joined the organization but kept their own texts.

³⁷ “Yiju beiji” 移居碑記. Also see Chapter 5.

The Gantang Zhangs and Jitou

The case of the Gans is relatively simple, since the Jixia Gans apparently were able to provide the most textual evidence to support their claim as the progenitor of this surname, so that even the Menli Gans, a family of government students and painters, admitted the genealogical line that Jixia constructed. For some surnames, due to a lack of textual evidence, no one could claim leader status. Each village compiled their own genealogies, and cooperated or competed with one another. The Zhang in Pingnan provide the best example of this second model. Since the Southern Song dynasty, “Zhang” was a common surname in this area, and a certain connection had been built among these dispersed Zhang villages under the leadership of Zheyang during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as I discuss in the Chapter 1. However, during the Yuan-Ming transition, the Zhangs became the target of attack and this alliance was dissolved. Throughout the Ming dynasty, the Zhangs in northern Gutian were still populous but more dispersed. Hardly any of them left any written records throughout the Ming period. During the Ming-Qing transition, several Zhang families attained prominent status, even though some of these successful families, such as the Jitou Zhangs, were relatively marginal in previous dynasties.

Although several Zhang villages had initiated efforts in lineage building during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was not until 1848, that a government student from the Gantang Zhangs started to compile a formal genealogy. Relying on written materials from the Zheyang genealogy compiled in the fifteenth century—these are the main materials discussed in Chapter 1—he claimed The Gantang Zhangs to be the direct descendants of the first branch of the Zheyang Zhangs. He copied the long preface from the Zheyang genealogy into the Gantang genealogy that he compiled and tried to

connect their genealogical line from the mid-Ming to that of the Zheyang Zhangs, which stopped at the Yuan dynasty.³⁸ Although this connection from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries is very obscure, the compiler attempted to use this material to elevate their status among the Zhangs in Pingnan—in the nineteenth century, Zheyang was no longer a village in which Zhang was the principal surname, and Gantang was the closest village where Zhang was the principal surname. While the Zheyang genealogy traces their ancestors to some high officials in the ninth century, connecting to the Zheyang texts also anchored the Gantang Zhangs to the grand narration of history.

Although the Gantang Zhangs claimed to be the direct decedents of their common progenitor and implied their leadership among the Zhangs in Pingnan, the most powerful village with the surname Zhang during the nineteenth century was the Jitou Zhangs. Their leaders, Zhang Buqi, contributed much of his wealth to the establishment of Pingnan County in 1730s. In 1832, Jitou produced the first metropolitan graduate in Pingnan history. When several government students compiled the formal genealogy of Jitou around 1870s, they also claimed to be the descendants of Zheyang, which is apparently the earliest Zhang family supported by textual materials in Pingnan/northern Gutian. The textual and oral materials of Jitou could trace their history back more than two hundred and fifty years to their first settlement in their current location in 1610, but they could not find any evidence before the seventeenth century. However, they did not use any material from the genealogy of the Gantang Zhangs. Their evidence to link to the earliest Zhang family during the Song dynasty is so slight –so slight that even in 2002 when they revised the genealogy, the genealogists still complained about “a three-hundred-year” lacuna in their family

³⁸ *Gantang Zhang-shi zupu*, 84.

history.³⁹ However, they still did not adopt the materials from Gantang and endorse their leadership.

When the Jitou Zhangs compiled their first formal genealogy in the 1870s, they did not follow the genealogical structure previously outlined by Gantang. Moreover, they also excluded another group of Zhang families in Jitou from their genealogy. The official reason for excluding this group with the same surname and living in almost the same location was that their ancestors moved to Jitou in different periods. According to their genealogies, the group that called themselves the Xitou Zhangs 溪頭張氏 arrived to Upper Jitou in the 1410s and only moved to the current location of Jitou in 1670, and the group that called themselves the Bajia Zhangs 八家張氏 arrived to current Jitou in the 1610s, sixty years earlier than the other group.⁴⁰

What the genealogy was not totally revealed was that during the Ming-Qing transition, the Xitou Zhangs in Upper Jitou 上滌頭 was the leader of local militia and expanded its size by attacking other villages. Although in the Xitou Zhangs' genealogy compiled years later, the compiler of the Xitou Zhangs eagerly explained that their ancestors, famous for bravery and witticism, resisted the allure of the “rebel-bandits” during the Three-Tributaries Rebellion, this only served to show the close connection between their ancestors and the bandits.⁴¹ When they expanded from meager Upper Jitou

³⁹ *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu bajia zhipu* 滌頭張氏族譜八家支譜, 41–45, 274–275.

⁴⁰ *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu* 溪頭張氏族譜, 88, 113.

⁴¹ The biography of the ancestor of the Xitou Zhangs who moved from Upper Jitou to Jitou particularly emphasized that it was because of his “righteousness” that he defeated all the “bandits” and that no one could ever harm him—this implied his power and high local status; the biography also noted that following his “mission,” his sons suddenly accumulated “tens of thousands in gold.” See *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu* 溪頭張氏族譜, 112, 113.

to rich Jitou during the chaotic period, it was inevitable that conflict would arise between the Xitou Zhangs arrivals and the original residents, the Bajia Zhangs. Even though they shared the same surname, this military background constructed a clear distinction between these two groups of people in Jitou. Therefore, when the group of Bajia Zhangs first compiled their formal genealogy, they excluded the members of the Xitou Zhangs from their genealogical lines. Usually when the surname group in the same settlement had distinct sub-groups, they tended to explain that they were the descendants of the different sons by the same progenitor in this settlement and made a connection of pseudo-siblings. For example, when compiling their first genealogy in the 1730s, the Jixia Gans divided themselves as the descendants of the four sons of their founding ancestors. However, the Bajia Zhangs did not try to compile an all-inclusive genealogy and only in 1990s a genealogy to include both two Zhangs in Jitou was compiled.

In 1896, the Xitou Zhangs of Jitou eventually started to compile their formal genealogy. This task was undertaken by the compiler Zhang Honglu 張鴻廬, an ambitious and talent government student. To compete with the Bajia Zhangs, in addition to their own records of ancestral graves, he inclusively consulted the materials from the Zheyang genealogy, the Gantang genealogy, the Bajia Zhangs' genealogy, another Zhang genealogy borrowed from Wenyang 溫洋, and an "Old Tingzhou Genealogy" (*Tingzhou jiupu* 汀州舊譜) that the compiler copied from a Zhang family in Ningde.⁴² Zhang Honglu eventually compiled a long genealogy that collaged together the old materials from different sources. The Old Tingzhou Genealogy, which claimed to have been copied from

⁴² *Jitou Zhang-shi xuji lidai zhipu* 滌頭張氏續集歷代支譜, 1/12.

Shibi 石壁 of Ninghua 寧化 County in Tingzhou, brought their genealogical line back to the fifth son of the legendary Yellow Emperor. Although Zhang Honglu clearly noticed the conflicts between this record from Tingzhou and their native record, he decided to follow the Tingzhou one to extend their lineage history.⁴³ The materials from Zheyang provided the details of their ancestral history from the late Tang to the Yuan dynasty after the Tingzhou genealogy, and the genealogical line compiled by Gantang and Wenyang helped him to trace the obscure history of their ancestors' early migration during the Ming period. In order to connect their genealogical line to that of Wenyang, which brought them to Gangtang, Zheyang, and as far as Shibi, Zhang Honglu claimed that their original record made an error on their founding ancestor's name, because it did not follow the generational naming order recorded in the Gantang genealogy. In other words, he "corrected" the name of their ancestor, so that he could claim their ancestor moved from Wenyang to Upper Jitou, and from Upper Jitou to current Jitou, which was then the most important market town in southeastern Pingnan.⁴⁴ By doing so, he could make a genealogical line that connected their ancestors to the general history of the Zhangs in this region and place him on a chair next to Bajia Zhangs in the same village.

A large part of this new and comprehensive genealogy is devoted to tracing the early legendary ancestors from the late Tang, who came to the Fujian mountains to fight with the rebels under the notorious Huang Chao 黃巢. One of them even died bravely in a battle with them. The compiler attempted to construct an image that they were the direct descendants of these honorable high officials and generals who were loyal to the emperor

⁴³ Ibid., 2/19-20. Shibi of Ninghua is itself a legendary location. Many southern immigrants claim to be the first Fujian settlement of their ancestors from northern China.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3/4-5.

and combated rebels. The emphasis on the descendants of the loyalists might be used to cover the fact that their ancestors were actually rebels during the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. To make his narration persuasive, Zhang Honglu used a variety of textual materials to present the details of these generals including a stone inscription that one had copied from a temple and a hymn to their bravery written by a Ming minister.⁴⁵ The authenticity and sources of these two texts might be unclear to modern scholar, but incorporating these authoritative texts into their genealogy greatly increased the credibility of their record, and required the sophisticated skill of literary composition that the members of Xitou Zhangs acquired in the late nineteenth century.

In this genealogy compiled by the Xitou Zhangs in Jitou, the Bajia Zhangs in Jitou and the Gantang Zhangs and are barely mentioned; the focus is solely on the succession among the Xitou Zhangs and their ancient ancestors in the ninth and tenth centuries. As the status of Xitou Zhangs rose in local politics and economy since the late nineteenth century,⁴⁶ this comprehensive and erudite version became the standard that everyone followed. Unlike the Gans in Pingnan, the overall genealogy of all the Zhang villages in Pingnan does not exist. Other Zhang villages in Xiling, Shenyang 深洋 and Shiyang 仕洋, as well as the modern revision of the Gantang and the Baijia Zhangs' genealogies, all adopted the ancestral history narrated in the Xitou Zhangs' genealogy, and directly copied content from it into their later genealogies.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2/26–28.

⁴⁶ Because the capitals they accumulated and the location of their village, Xitou Zhag became one of the most important traders in this region since the latter half of the nineteenth century, after the opening of Fuzhou treaty port, see Chapter 6.

In the case of the Zhangs in Pingnan, we see that the competition among the villages with the same surname produced different genealogical versions. As the competition continued, increasing numbers of different texts were included and the scope of the compilation was also broadened. While no one could direct the work of other villages, the process of mutual construction functioned in more subtle ways.

The Badi Lans and the Guanyang Jiangs

While some minor villages were included in the genealogical tradition by the major families with the same surname, other minor villages whose surnames were relatively weak, isolated, and less populous in Pingnan also started to compile their own genealogies in the late nineteenth century. For example, Badi village is situated right next to Jixia and dominated by the Lan family, a surname which is usually associated with the She people, an ethnic minority with a lower cultural degree. The Badi Lans did not have any degree-holders or government students in their family history. Compared to their wealthy neighbors famous for their numerous properties in Pingnan and Gutian, the Lans' properties were limited to nearby mountains—and, as they claimed in the genealogy, the Jixia Gans had encroached on some of these. However, around 1878, the Badi Lans compiled a genealogy, as did several other minor villages, such as the Qiantang Lins and the Guanyang Jiangs 官洋江氏, who respectively compiled their genealogies sometime in the 1890s and 1900s.⁴⁷

The genealogies of the Badi Lans and other minor surnames are distinguishable from those of major families in many aspects: quality of paper, calligraphy, general structure,

⁴⁷ *Qiantang Lin-shi zupu*; *Guanyang Jiang-shi zupu*.

and writing style (Figures 1 & 2). Without the literary background enjoyed by major surnames, the genealogies of these villages could not be decorated with a list of degree-holders, stylish prefaces, and poems lauding the scenes in villages. They also could not provide textual materials tracing their ancestors to historical figures or to the Yellow Emperor, as the Zhangs and the Gans had. However, all of the minor surname genealogies still offer a narration of historical migration from Northern China. The structures of these narrations are similar to those of the major families: a high official escaped from the political chaos and moved to Fuzhou during the late Tang period; under some particular circumstance he or his descendants moved further into the Gutian mountains.⁴⁸ But compared to genealogies supported by abundant textual materials, narrations of their origins are relatively brief and less precise with respect to historical details. For example, in the Lans' narration, the only marker of a historical period in the entire story concerns their ancestor, a high official, who moved to Houguan 侯官 during the reign of Tang Xizhong (唐僖宗, r. 873–888). After meeting a Buddhist monk, he donated all his property to build a Buddhist temple. Following the instruction of this monk, he was led by two “stone cows” to Gutian and found a place to settle down. His settlement flourished and one of his descendants moved to the current location of Badi.⁴⁹ In another section, the genealogy mentions that one of their ancestors persuaded the silver miners to leave. Because of this, their ancestor earned the respect of his neighbors, and was asked to

⁴⁸ We have already seen this pattern in the genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos during the late sixteenth century.

⁴⁹ *Badi Lan-shi zupu*, 1–3.

manage the taxes of his sector. However, except for a very vague reference to “during the Ming,” there are no time-marker illustrating the historical period.⁵⁰

Some others genealogies stress on the destructive influence over the dynastic transition. The genealogy of the Guanyang Jiangs has similar features with the Lans’ but told a different story. The genealogy claims that they were the descendants of a gentleman with the same surname in Gutian during the Ming, but in the last years of the last Ming emperor, disturbances were everywhere and the distant mountains became the field of wars. The situation was worsened by a local rebellion in the third and the fourth years of the Shunzhi reign (1646—1647), and in 1662, the twenty households of the Jiang family moved to a fort on the mountain across from Guanyang to escape the chaos. They fought with the official army in the next year, and only six years later did they moved down from the mountain to different locations. During these violent disturbances, the Tiger Lady of Jiang (*jianghupo* 江虎婆), who was one of their female ancestors but became a local deity, protected them and led them to overcome the attack from the official army.⁵¹ Although this story is written to show the blessings from their ancestors and local deity, it also puts them into an ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the current regime. Unlike the Xitou Zhangs who tried to cover their rebellious past with polished written texts, the Guanyang Jiangs was far

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4–5.

⁵¹ The Tiger Lady of Jiang was a local deity worshipped not only by the Jiang family. Her story was recorded in local gazetteers since the Ming and according to the Qing gazetteer, her influence in Pingnan was no less than the Lady of Linshui, the regional deity on Fujian and originating from Gutian. While the descriptions in local gazetteers only state the story of how she defeated a tiger with her wisdom and became a deity without providing any historical details, the Jiang genealogy claimed she was the young sister of a famous gentleman during the Ming. Since the Guanyang Jiangs claimed to be the descendants of this gentleman, the Tiger Lady of Jiang also became their ancestor. See *Guanyang Jiang-shi zupu*, 15–17 and *Qiagnlong Pingana xianzhi*, 6/22. It is often for a descendant group claiming to be the descendants of a deity with the same surname. For example, the Longtan Chens also claimed to be the descendants of the Lady of Linshui, whose secular name is Chen Jinggu.

less sensitive. The narration of their ancestral history ends at this point without a further development.

These timeless, episodic, and sometimes inconsistent narrations in the Lans' and the Jiangs' genealogies have the features of orality. The plots are dramatic, sometimes mixed with legendary stories, but the historical details are vague. Both were not developed into a coherent family history, and both did not provide a reasonable genealogical chart from their early ancestors to the current members. While a part of their genealogies is certainly based on previous written materials such as the detailed records of their properties, another part is oral histories being turned into texts. To make these random materials into a coherent written account required certain level of literary skills that the members of these minor families might not equip.

Certainly these villages did not compile their genealogies independently. In a historical circumstance that favored written texts over oral histories, these genealogies reflect the process of transition taken by communities to textualize their communal roots. Once genealogies became the norm among distinguished families, it was not difficult for these villages to find references, and to construct genealogies of their own even though they featured simpler structures and unadorned language. Without any government students or civil examination candidates in their villages, they simply imitated the model set by the degree-holders in other major families and compiled their own simple edition on the basis of oral histories and other written records. In this way, the textual tradition of genealogy penetrated into a broader range of communities and enriched the local production of texts.

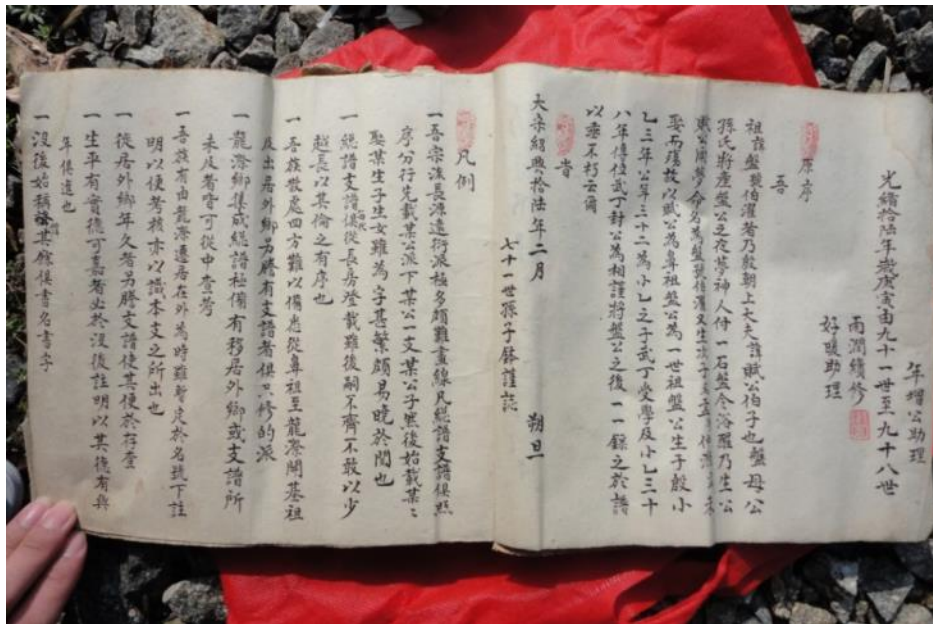


Figure 1 The Genealogy of the Jixia Gans (1886)

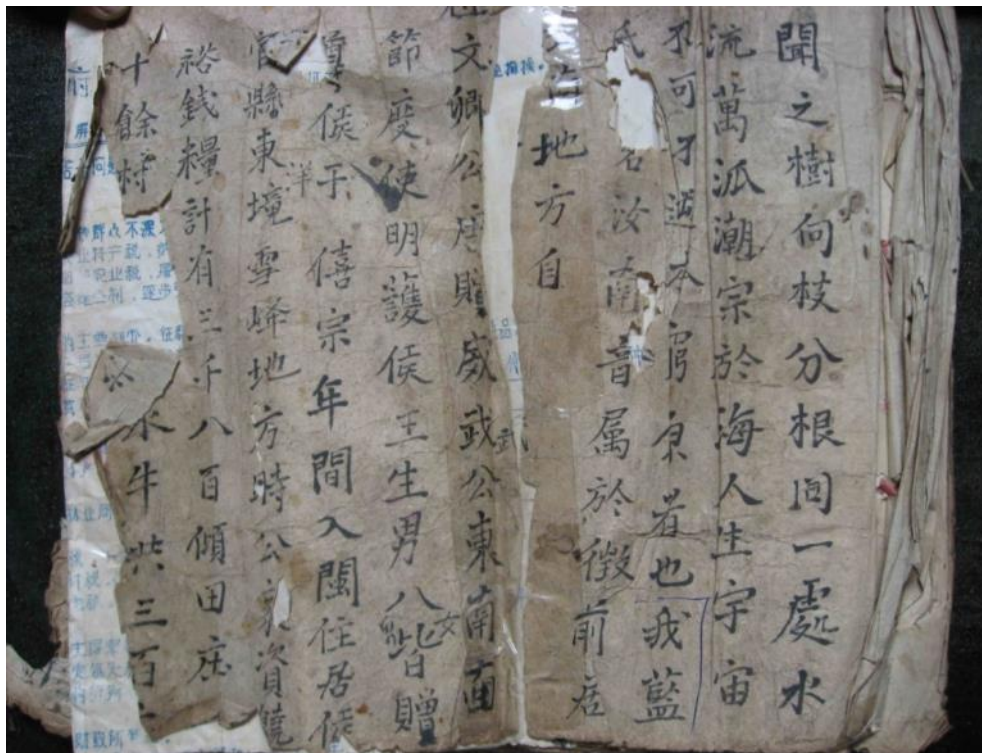


Figure 2 The Genealogy of the Badi Lans (the late 19th century)

The Production of Genealogies:

Standardization and Diversification

The proliferation of genealogies during this period indicates both the desire to organize descent groups and the elevation of this genre as authoritative texts. In comparison to several core areas such as the Yangtze River Delta or the Pearl River Delta, the delayed impulse is related to the relatively late political and cultural integration of Pingnan into imperial institutions. In different regions of China, the process of cultural integration and the progress of lineage building varied considerably and did not necessarily evolve linearly. In Pingnan, the late-Ming development of genealogy compilation and general integration were apparently interrupted by the dynastic transition. In this specific background of reconstruction in Pingnan, the role of government students in genealogy compilation was particularly outstanding. Sharing similar ideologies and educational background, these newly-rising government students from local families were the primary agents to standardize the production of genealogies in Pingnan.

It is easy to imagine that government students, their Confucian education, and lineage agenda became crucial factors influencing the standardization of genealogy compilation in Pingnan and elsewhere. However, there were certainly other factors that contributed to the similarity of genealogies. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a group of professional genealogists thrived in southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian. These lineage-based professionals learned their skills of genealogy compilation from masters – usually their father or an uncle – and used the same business name for generations. They traveled from village to village and offered their service to those who wanted a genealogy but lacked the necessary literary skills. The professional genealogists, together with their

disciple-assistants, would reside in the village for months, collect previous genealogies, old documents, and current information, and then apply their own model to produce genealogies for their customers. Each genealogist might have his own style and method according to training from his lineage. For example, some genealogists hand-wrote the genealogies whereas others had them printed with wooden movable types. Regardless of the method, for efficiency, traveling genealogists used the same exemplar for different genealogies and simply changed the names and places.⁵²

With such a standardized procedure, the genealogies compiled by the same group of traveling genealogists, not surprisingly, resemble each other. For example, the genealogies from Figures 3 to 5 were all printed by wooden movable types and made by professional genealogists in southern Zhejiang. Their layouts of genealogical charts are similar to one another, even though the first one was not made in the same location as the other two.⁵³ The other two genealogies belonged to two different lineages, but they were made in the village during the same year (1912). The notes in their title pages revealed that they were also made by the genealogist from the same “house” (*tang* 堂). It was very possible that the genealogist came to their village and made these two genealogies one after another.

⁵² According to the professional genealogists I interviewed in 2008, sometimes when the information that villagers provided was insufficient, they would make it up from their “experience.” For example, a genealogist showed me a genealogy and reported that the villagers did not have the records of their ancestors’ names for several generations; so, he made up the names according to the generation names he had set for this lineage. Although this is a contemporary case, this kind of practice might also have taken place in the nineteenth century among professional genealogists.

⁵³ The first one was made in Qianyangdi 前垵底 village in nowadays Cangnan 蒼南 County and the rest two were made in Ningcun 寧村 village in Longwan 龍灣 District. The distance between them is about 70 km.



Figure 3 Genealogy of the Qianyangdi Chens 前垵底陳氏 in southern Zhejiang (1896), a wooden move-type printed genealogy made a professional genealogist



Figure 4 The Genealogy of Ningcun Hans 寧村韓氏 (1912) in southern Zhejiang, another wooden movable-type printed genealogy made by a professional genealogist



Figure 5 The Genealogy of Ningcun Jiangs 寧村蔣氏(1912) in southern Zhejiang, another movable wooden movable-type printed genealogy made by a professional genealogist

The professionalization of genealogy compilation obviously responded to the rising need of genealogies, as well as rising commercial activities in this region during the long nineteenth century, when even villagers with less literary sources felt the urgency to have their own genealogy. The professional knowledge of genealogists about what an ideal genealogy should be directed the format and part of the content of these genealogies; the ideas of those who hired the professional genealogists did not. However, through accepting these products as their own family history, the ideal image of lineage was also disseminated to these villagers who held a relatively lower place in the cultural hierarchy. A commercial factor thus played an important role in the standardization of genealogies; while interpreting the social and cultural significance of these genealogies to the particular families they represented, this commercial factor needs to be taken into account.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The description of these professional genealogists is based on my fieldwork research in 2008 and the genealogies I collected in this region. During this fieldwork, I met three professional genealogists in three

In addition to professional genealogists, the printing business was another factor that contributed to standardized production of genealogies. Similar to being compiled by professionals, being printed by commercial printers to some degree stabilized the content of genealogies and regulated the format. Even though the lineage members compiled the genealogy all by themselves, they followed models provided by previously printed genealogies that they constantly accessed, and the printers also contributed to the process of production by adjusting the characters or formats into modular templates. These standardized formats decided what kind of content should be included, and how it would be presented. In parts of western and southern Fujian, where commercial printing was very active during the nineteenth century, it was very popular for local people to have their genealogies printed. The drafts of genealogies would be sent to local printing centers, printed using woodblocks and distributed to the lineage members who donated funds to cover the cost. This method of genealogy production apparently required more funding and further corporation among lineage members, and was mostly supported by larger lineage alliances as a crucial method to construct their identity.

different towns (Pingyangkeng 平陽坑 of Ruiyan 瑞安, Qianku 錢庫 and Linxi 靈溪 of Cangnan 蒼南) in southern Zhejiang. Each uses a different style for compiling genealogies, and two come from family businesses that trace back to the nineteenth century. These genealogist families are still active in southern Zhejiang, and travel around northern Fujian and southern Zhejiang to do their business. In Pingyangkeng, at least two lineages still trained professional genealogists. This group of professional genealogists deserves more study than the brief overview provided here. For the description of another group of professional genealogists who came back and forth to Jiangxi and northern Fujian during the nineteenth century, see Xie Shuishun 謝水順 and Li Ting 李珽, *Fujian gudai keshu* 福建古代刻書 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin, 1997), 510-513. For similar practices in the Jiangnan area during the Qing and Republican era, see Xu Xiaoman, “‘Preserving the Bonds of Kin’ Genealogy Masters and Genealogy Production in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Area in the Qing and Republican Periods,” *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, 332–369. I also met one professional genealogist in Pingnan, who was a retired clerk from a government department. Self-trained, he started his business partly because of the revival of genealogy compilation in Pingnan in recent years, and partly because of his personal interest of local history.

In southern Zhejiang and northeastern Fujian, another way to print genealogies was to print them by wooden movable-types (Figures 3-5). Since there are always many repetitive characters in a genealogy, picking up movable-types became more effective than carving wooden blocks. Moreover, unlike the wooden blocks, after printing a genealogy, the wooden movable types could be dissembled and were reusable. Therefore the client did not have to be able to afford the price for the block, which was usually one of the primary expenses of printing a genealogy. Although effective and cheap, the quality of movable-type printed genealogies in northeastern Fujian and southern Zhejiang was relatively poor. In the case of woodblock printing, the genealogist compiled the written draft of genealogy and sent it to the commercial printer. Lineage members participated more in the process of compilation, and the content could be repetitively inspected. In the case of movable-type printing, the printer was also the genealogist. The printer-genealogists compiled the genealogies for their clients, resembled the formats and printed out their own compilation. Lineage members provided the materials but were relatively passive in the process of compilation. The content and formats among different movable-type printed genealogies were also more monotonous, and were controlled by the professional genealogists. However, wooden movable-type printed genealogies were popular among minor families in these areas since the nineteenth century. Their lineage organizations were smaller, so were the lengths of their genealogies. They needed a “formal” genealogy, but they could not compile it by themselves and did not need to have too many copies. These printer-genealogists provided them a low-budget choice, and a genealogy with the formal appearance of a printed book.

The proximity to local printing centers and lower cost of print were among the most important factors to popularize printed genealogies in these regions, but whether lineage members decided to put their genealogies into print or not was a complicated matter that was related to cultural perceptions toward genealogies and lineages. For example, a modern professional genealogist told me that his clients in the villages of northeastern Fujian insisted on handwritten genealogies, because they believed hand-written texts were more formal and more accurate than their cheap printed counterparts. Their genealogies compiled by professional genealogists were carefully written on fine paper and carefully bound in large format. By doing so, they intentionally limited the reproduction of genealogies and elevated the authority of the original handwritten copy.⁵⁵ This type of handwritten genealogies made by professional genealogists could be found in the villages in northeastern Fujian from the early nineteenth century (Figures 6-7). Their choice of handwritten genealogies by professional genealogists is associated with lower literacy rates and the smaller scale of concentrated lineage groups in these northeastern Fujian villages; by comparison the larger lineage alliances in southern and western Fujian tended to produce their voluminous genealogies using wooden block printing methods. They also tried to distinguish themselves from their poor or presumably less cultural neighbors who could not afford handwritten hard-cover genealogies and make their genealogies movable-type printed.

⁵⁵ Several different practices enhanced the authority of genealogical texts. For example, Liu Yonghua 劉永華 records a ritual performed for the completion of printed genealogies in western Fujian. See Liu Yonghua, “Jipu yu youpu: youguan Minxi kejia zupu xiangguan xishi de biji 祭譜與游譜：有關閩西客家族譜相關儀式的筆記,” in Chen Zhiping eds., *Xiangju xiuxiu ting: Fu Yiling jiaoshou danchen yibai zhounian jinian wenji* 相聚休休亭：傅衣凌教授誕辰 100 周年紀念文集 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue, 2012), 656-675.

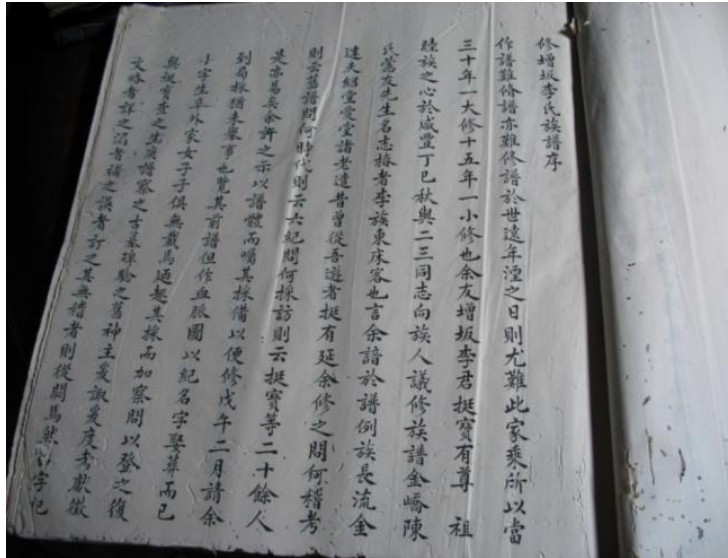


Figure 6 The Genealogy of the Zengban Lis 增坂李氏 (1860) in northeastern Fujian, a hand-written genealogy by a professional genealogist

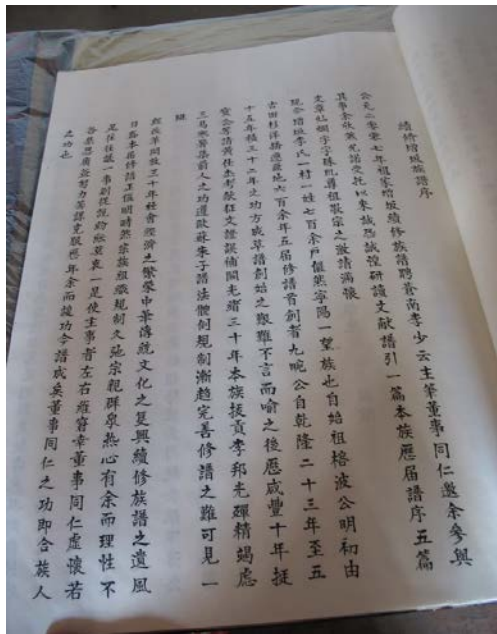


Figure 7 The New Genealogy of the Zengban Lis (2008) made by a professional genealogist. Even in the twenty-first century, hand-written genealogies are still valued by people in this region.

However, in Pingnan, due to its scale of genealogy compilation and the degree of commercialization, there was no trace of professional genealogists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and printed genealogies did not appear until the 1990s. Although

many genealogies appeared in Pingnan during these two centuries, all of them were handwritten and compiled by non-professional lineage members, affinal relatives, or friends. This individualistic mode of production allowed more diversity among genealogical texts in Pingnan. Unlike professional genealogists who produced numerous genealogies and repeated their own model, a non-professional compiler might only compile the genealogy for his lineage once in his lifetime, and would have had to learn it from old genealogies he could find. During this process of learning and applying, on the one hand, he transmitted the textual tradition of previous editions, but, on other hand, there was also more space for the compiler to adjust the format for the current requirement. Variations in the format and quality of their work reflect the different literary qualification of non-professional genealogy compilers. The difference between the genealogy compiled by the unknown compiler in Badi and the several genealogies compiled by government students in neighboring Jixia is striking, even though they were compiled in the same era and in neighboring locations.

Unlike the multiple copies of printed genealogies with the same content, the content of handwritten genealogies in Pingnan villages were rather malleable. For most genealogies in Pingnan villages only one authoritative copy survived, but in some cases, genealogies were thoroughly or partly copied several times and several copies remained. In order to maintain the status of authority, most reproductions have kept the content unchanged—several twentieth-century copies of the genealogy of the Jixia Gans compiled in the late nineteenth century followed this pattern. But for practical reasons, sometimes the content was changed for different purposes. For example, almost the entire content of the genealogy of the Xiaoliyang Gans in 1889 was identical to the one of Jixia, but the

preface was changed to make it the “branch genealogy” of Xiaoliyang, a customized copy for another village with the same surname. Both the genealogies of the Xitou Zhangs in Jitou and of the Jixia Gans that were compiled in the late nineteenth century were copied again several times, sometimes with minor changes or with the addition of a later genealogical line. The 1956 copy of the Xitou Zhangs’ genealogy in particular underwent remarkable changes (Figure 8). Copied under a politically sensitive period, much of the content of the original nineteenth-century copy was removed so as not to show “feudal poison,” and a long remark was added to defend the efforts of copiers for reproducing the genealogy under a Marxist regime.⁵⁶ Moreover, the hand-copied genealogies left a space for the copier to add the content (Figure 9). There were many genealogies to which descendants kept adding new content, such as information about new members, so that the genealogies were never finished. Later descendants might also directly correct the content of genealogies for different reasons, instead of compiling a new one. Compared to the relative closure of printed genealogies, handwritten genealogies in Pingnan remained open to change and were always in the making.

⁵⁶ See *Qinghe Zhangshi yuanquan jiapu jielu ben* 清河張氏淵泉家譜節錄本.

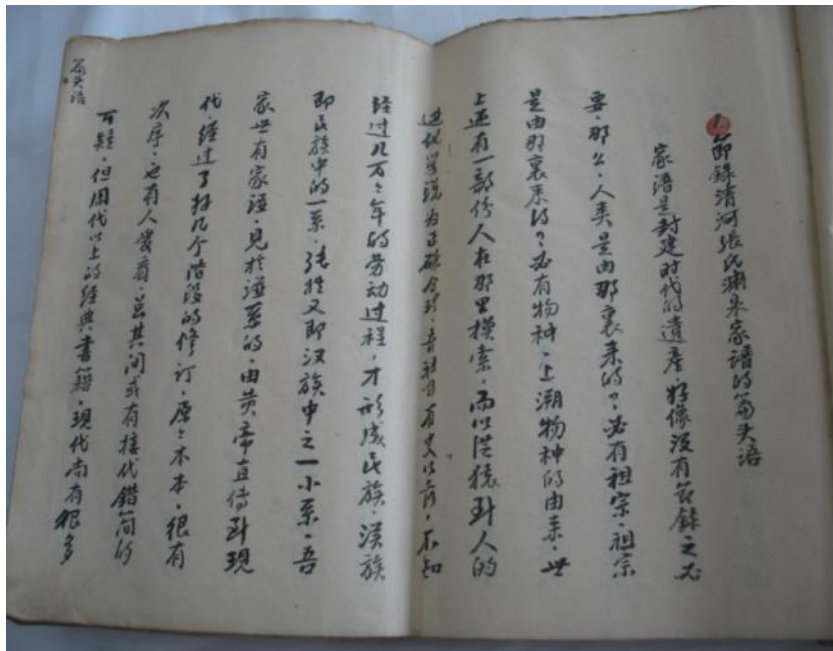


Figure 8 The 1957 Copy of the Genealogy of the Xitou Zhangs in Jitou, with a preface to defense the compilation of genealogy

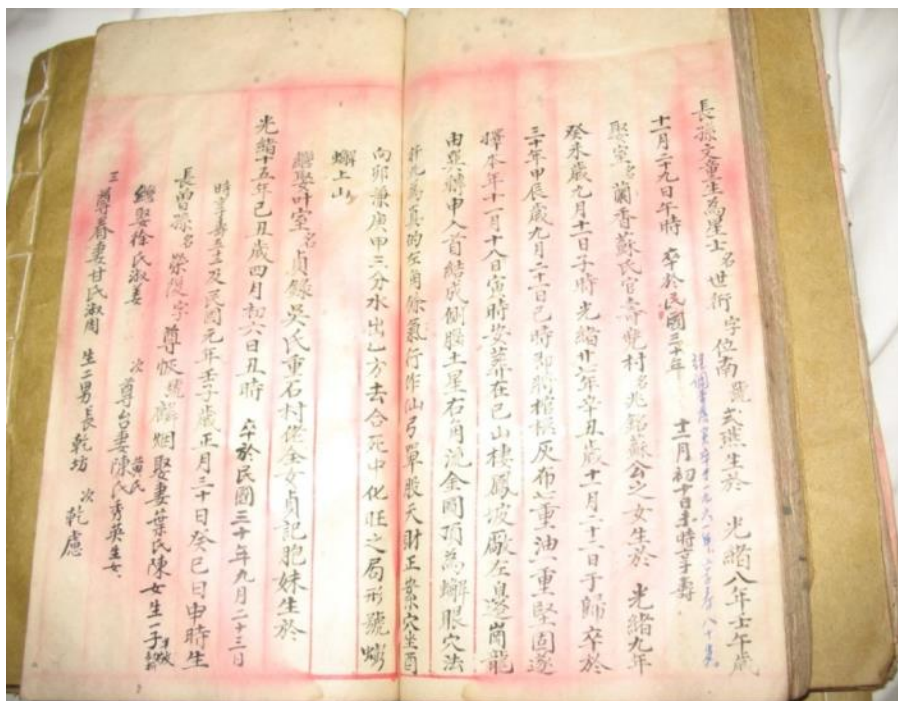


Figure 9 The Genealogy of the Xitou Zhangs in Jitou (1913): new 1941 contents (the date of death) added in different handwriting

Genealogists and modern scholars both tend to take “genealogy” as a distinct genre with a standardized format and several crucial components. These format and components are understood to be inherited from the evolution of a long-standing tradition widely shared by the “Chinese people.” While genealogists learn these features from the extant genealogies they have access to, modern scholars mostly learn them from the genealogical collection in libraries. These collectible, multi-volume genealogies, usually coming from a complex lineage organization, easily convey the impression of maturity and rationality. Relying on these intentional textual fabrications to characterize the historical development of lineage organizations blurs the boundaries between ideal images and reality, and inevitably exaggerates the actual extent of organization and uniformity. Even though we understand genealogy compiling as the attempt to organize descent groups, if we investigate the actual genealogical productions of local communities, it is easy to find variations among texts that are all deemed as genealogies; the different cases in Pingnan epitomize this situation. These variations indicate that even though a genealogist might have an ideal image of what a genealogy ought to be, final products are subject to different social and cultural factors.

Most local documents are produced under the tension of two forces. One is to fit them into a general textual model; this provides the source of authority and allows localities to communicate with a broader cultural tradition. The other one is to fit available information into current local contexts, so that they could be practically used by local people. A local document is usually made between these two ends. Under this tension, ideas are exchanged within the composition of the documents, which further influenced how actions were taken. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pingnan, the rapid political

and social integration urged local families to organize themselves by constructing a textual foundation to support their claims. Formalized genealogies were therefore created to connect them to the general model of “the state and the loyal lineages.” However, at the same time, their mode of production, with a lower threshold of investment and a higher degree of invention, allowed Pingnan people to create their own genealogical texts, and regard them as formal genealogies. Especially in the late nineteenth century when families with lower cultural degrees also tried to create their own genealogies, the category of genealogy in Pingnan was further diversified. The co-existence of these differentiated genealogical texts in the same era and the same community shows the prevailing attempts of lineage building; moreover, even with the pressure to integrate, differentiation in lineage practices persisted.

Conclusion

The collected genealogies in libraries illustrate the refined results of lineage building and represent a smaller range of variety. An analysis that is based merely on final textual products does not take into account the contributions of all communities or the social circumstances in which texts were embedded. A genealogy is not solely fabricated by a single genealogist, and its content is not an original literary creation. To fully understand a genealogical text, it is necessary to put it back into its local context, and investigate the general production of texts underway in the corresponding community. Therefore, in this chapter, instead of concentrating on a single refined genealogy, I trace the production of

several genealogies in a larger community during a specific period of time, and try to locate their textual fabrications in the local contexts.

Apparently, in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century Pingnan, the revival of genealogical production was triggered by the reconstruction of the social order and changes in the social structure after the establishment of the new Pingnan County. The affirmation of the status of lineage from the political authority encouraged local people to organize themselves in the form of lineages, and a new literary group developed through civil examinations became the leaders for local families to create their own genealogies and to retell their ancestral histories. A written genealogy became a cultural symbol that successful families needed to join the newly built social network of local elites, but even less successful families felt the need to create a genealogy. Government students educated in the Confucian classics, who traveled around the county seat and provincial capital, were central figures facilitating the production of genealogies. They learned the general concepts and format of genealogies outside the community, and exchanged ideas and skills with one another. They discovered family documents and oral stories within their lineage and incorporated them into a written genealogy. Their training in the Confucian classics endowed them with the literary skill needed to compile their genealogies and to ornament the documentation with orthodox rhetoric. As recently as the early eighteenth century, local officials had described Pingnan as a “barbaric”; these histories of Pingnan’s glorious past created during genealogy compilation transformed its residents into the loyal descendants of imperial subjects.

Because genealogies are the most representative texts created within the lineage, sometimes—particularly in early times—they have been mistaken as neutral descriptions

of lineage organizations. In recent scholarship, researchers realize the fabrication and intentionality that fuels genealogy production. Scholars analyze the texts of genealogies and characterize them as attempts at lineage building. However, it is still imprudent to take the static result of an accomplished genealogy as completely representative of the dynamic process of lineage building. To better understand the role of genealogies, it is necessary to differentiate various lineage documents from genealogies. While a complicated lineage organization is shaped, it is inevitable that many documents are created to serve different purposes: certificates of registered household, registers of ancestral worships, records of sacrificial fields or corporate properties, records of the birthdays of family members, documents of house-dividing, and more. If we delve into the process of genealogy compiling, it is not difficult to find that most genealogies are based on such written materials. However, genealogists do not merely collect these materials and make them into a collected archive. What distinguishes genealogies from other lineage documents is that, in addition to tailoring these documents into a coherent account, the compiler imposes his ideal of this genre onto his compilation. The compiler self-consciously realizes that he is making “the” genealogy of his lineage, and this consciousness decides what this composition should contain. Therefore, when we read a genealogy, we are not simply viewing a comprehensive account of a lineage; rather, we are seeing how a compiler in his era imagined his own lineage, and articulated the available documents to construct a textual fabrication that reflects his own version of lineage history. While the original lineage documents in a genealogy might disclose some information about this group, the materials and imagination that the compiler added illustrate more his ideas about lineage at the time he compiled the genealogy. The compiler’s ideas might not be shared by all the

members of the lineage group (many of them might not have the ability to read the genealogy), but through textualizing a coherent image of the lineage and relating its members to the lineage history, these ideas were practiced and practically influenced the formation of lineage organization.

We must also recognize that, although some motivation is behind each compilation or revision, the textual construction of lineage does not always represent the actual development of the organization. Many of the early genealogies, such as the first genealogy of the Jixia Gans, were initiated by a zealous individual or a rather small group of people. Some of these descriptions of a lone pioneer were made to accentuate the contribution of the first compiler and their details were not always precise. However, these descriptions imply not only that genealogy compiling was not always a communal activity supported by the “entire lineage” but also that all the members who were included into a particular construction of a lineage did not necessarily accept the resulting genealogical composition. Whether a genealogy is a communal text or a personal account is sometimes called into question. In an extreme example, a large part of a genealogy compiled by a member of the Su 蘇 family from Boyuan 柏源 in the late nineteenth century is full of poems that the compiler wrote, the biographies of the compiler and his father, and his accusation of being swindled in a property dispute.⁵⁷ While our observations of lineage from written genealogies are largely influenced by the perception of a small number of motivated compilers, it is necessary to distinguish the personal intentions of the compilers from general statements. Understanding the cultural and social background of the compilers is critical.

⁵⁷ *Su-shi zupu lueji* 蘇氏族譜略記.

This does not mean that the textual constructions by privileged villagers should be dismissed as distortions or irrelevant. Actually, after written genealogies were constructed, the authority of these texts usually did shape the subsequent development of lineage organization. However, these genealogies did not “build” the lineage out of nothing. They represent either the confirmation of existing affiliations, such as the Gan genealogy compiled by Gan Yurun to include the materials from other Gan villages, or an effort to redefine current relationships for a favorable interpretation, such as the genealogy compiled by Zhang Honglu to elevate the status of his family among all the Zhang in Pingnan. Unlike lineage documents, which directly regulate a specific part of the organizational compartments in lineages, in both of these cases the textual constructions of genealogies represent attempts to project certain lineage ideas onto the existing order of social groups. Propagated by a few culturally privileged groups, these ideas did not necessarily reach all the members soon after the genealogy was made; neither the changed perceptions of members about their genealogical past nor the transformation of the structure of the lineage happened immediately. The impact of these efforts can only be evaluated by studying materials other than these genealogies.

On a larger plane, rather than looking for the transformation of society, what we can learn from the prevalence of genealogy compiling at this particular time and place concerns the transformation of social construction. Genealogy compiling was widely taken as a legitimate and effective method to construct a social community. Even though content and quality varied, “genealogy” as a particular textual product was widely admired and respected. This phenomenon was itself a historical transformation of the attitude toward texts and the textual construction of social community. Not only was this perception

revived and accepted by a wider audience but also more and more local people were equipped the ability and cultural resources to put it into practice. While the dissemination of this perception toward written genealogies and its practice was closely related to the social circumstances of these communities, the same communities also developed similar perception toward written texts in different social realms.

Chapter 5

Politics: Displaying Texts, Displaying Powers

When we talk about “texts,” written or printed words on paper, usually in the form of a book, tend to come to mind. However, paper is not the only medium to transmit words. If we confine our speculation to visual presentation, words can be carried in many different forms: written, printed, carved, projected, or digitally displayed. Presumably, how these words are transmitted determines the choice of which media to use. There are at least two dimensions of transmission that concern text-producers: how to temporally preserve the messages for recipients in different spans of time, and how to spatially circulate messages to recipients located in various places and in groups of various sizes. Some texts, such as ephemeral leaflets printed on poor-quality paper, are meant to be distributed to a large group but need to last for only a short period of time. Other texts are meant to be transmitted to a limited group of people but are meant to be sturdy enough to be passed on to several generations. Such was the expectation for the handwritten, well-bound, and large genealogies popular in some regions of northern Fujian. These genealogies are preserved in wooden boxes, put in a storage space above ancestral tablets, and can be viewed only on certain ceremonies or after getting permission from the ancestors by performing certain rituals.

Texts have two crucial qualities that are particularly related to these two dimensions of transmission: stability and accessibility. Stability is important to texts that are made to be preserved for a long period of time, and to transmit the same content unchanged to later recipients. By contrast, for texts that can be changed over time—extreme examples might

be letters on classroom blackboards or train departure times posted on an LED display—stability is seldom considered. Accessibility is the most important concern for texts carrying information that is meant to be circulated widely. These texts are supposed to be accessible beyond physical or intellectual barriers and to reach a large group of people. For texts that are not intended to be accessible, physical or intellectual barriers are established to restrict their accessibility to a small group of people. Tactics include making them difficult to be acquired or difficult to be understood.

Stelae have a long history in Chinese civilization.¹ Use of stone as the medium suggests how the texts on stelae were supposed to be transmitted. Texts carved on stone tablets were meant to be preserved for a long time without any change in content; they were placed at public sites to make it easy for anyone present at the site to access their content easily. In contrast with contracts or other written agreements, stelae are intended for the general public. In contrast with posters or announcements, they are meant to last for a long time. Texts that are supposed to be shared by a large group of people in a public space for a long period of time are usually created to maintain a certain kind of textual order in public, and they are usually supported by a certain kind of authority. The stone presents the textual presence of authority; it is the medium that the authority used to make itself physically present to the public.

¹ For a succinct investigation of the tradition of stelae and stone inscriptions in Chinese history, see Ye Changchi 葉昌熾, *Yushi* 語石 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1986). Robert Harrist Jr. investigates the history of stone inscription in early and medieval China, but he focuses on the inscriptions on natural terrains, not the man-made stone stelae discussed in this chapter. See Robert E. Harrist Jr., *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

In addition to stelae, many other texts are also supposed to last for a long time and deliver information to a public audience. Examples found in Pingnan County include inscribed wooden plaques (*bian'er* 匾額), commemorative arches (*paifang* 牌坊), divine placards (*shenbang* 神榜), ancestral tablets (*paiwei* 牌位), and written or carved signatures on public buildings (*timing* 題名). These texts are created by different people or institutions, placed at different sites, and indicate different attempts to convey the presence of public authority. To understand these texts, content is not the only thing that researchers have to consider. In my discussion of the stelae and texts for public display in Pingnan, I am particularly concerned with the authorities behind them, the publicity they created, their effects, and their limitations.

Displaying the State

Compared to writing on paper, it is considerably more time-consuming and costly to carve texts on stone and construct stelae. Whoever tries to establish a stele must have a certain level of economic and social resources, as well as a strong motivation. The stelae in Pingnan before the eighteenth century were rare and sporadic, and some may have been destroyed during the violent Ming-Qing transition.² Aside from tomb stelae, the two stelae established in 1685 and 1697 at the Xiangfeng Monastery of Tangkou are the earliest that have a clear context (Figure 10). The early history of this monastery is obscure. It is not

² So far the earliest stele was one tomb stele in Shuangxi, which claimed to have been established for the founding ancestor of the Lu 陸 of Shuangxi in the 1100s. Another broken stele attesting that their ancestor made donations for the building of a bridge was found in Ruiyun. This ancestor, according to the genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos was the wife of Yao Zirong, who lived in the late fourteenth century.

recorded in the official gazetteer compiled in 1600, but the later genealogy of the Tangkou Zhous claimed that it was established in the mid-thirteenth century and moved to its current location in the early sixteenth century. According to the stelae, it was in the early sixteenth century that the monastery received donations of properties.³ However, it is certain that right after the chaos of dynastic transition in the late seventeenth century, these two stelae were erected to reclaim the monastery's old properties and announce the new properties they received recently. In 1705, six years after the erection of the second stele, this monastery was reconstructed by local people. In 1772, the monastery was largely expanded by the Zhou of Tangkou, a prosperous family in southern Pingnan. This monastery became one of the "eight scenes" in Tangkou, and a poem celebrating it was written by the first Provincial Graduate of the Zhou of Tangkou and recorded in their genealogy.⁴ Compared to later stelae, the quality of these two stelae erected by the abbots right after the chaotic dynastic transition is poor. The calligraphy is rough, the spaces between characters are irregular, and the carving is uneven (Figure 10). However, the poor quality indicates the urgency to secure the properties in this period. The monastery attempted to restore the old order under a new regime.

³ *Tangkou Zhou-shi zupu*, 168.

⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 10 Two stelae of the Xiangfeng Monastery, Tangkou

Stelae in the New County Seat

Stelae became a general object in Pingnan only after the mid-eighteenth century. The establishment of Pingnan County in 1734 and the construction of the new county seat in Shuangxi 雙溪 mark the turning point after which the presence of stelae became common. It is not easy to build a new county seat from nothing. Shuangxi was chosen because a temporary office for “apprehending bandits” had been located there during the late Ming Dynasty.⁵ However, in 1734, what the new county magistrate Shen Zhong faced was an

⁵ The office was established in 1589 in response to a request by the local population seeking protection from the disturbance of “mountain bandits,” but half of its original staff was reduced in 1602. *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 159; *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 3/9b-10a.

“empty bureau amid waste fields and wild grasses” where “tigers gather outside the walls every night” and there were “only forty or fifty houses in the southwestern corner [of the county seat].”⁶ Magistrate Shen had no choice but to cooperate with local powers to set up the county government.

During his three-year service in Pingnan, Magistrate Shen is said to have built the city walls, the county bureau, the ever-normal granary, the county altar, the Confucian Temple, the county school, a charitable school, a charitable cemetery, and the Temple of City God.⁷ He either exaggerated his achievement or was helped very much by locals. Some of these public buildings were reconstructed from old buildings, but many were new. The budget for the county government during the Qing was limited; to cover construction expenses, the government largely relied on the support and contributions of powerful local families. To earn their support, Magistrate Shen had to maintain good relationships with them. After solving the problem concerning the quota of government students for Pingnan County,⁸ Magistrate Shen had a new group of government students from local families via civil and military examinations at the county level. These government students, coming from powerful families in Pingnan, became his supporters in local affairs. They called him “teacher” in poems they wrote for him and are listed as his assistants in the gazetteer that

⁶ Shen Zhong was actually the third magistrate that was assigned to Pingnan. However, the terms of the previous two were very short and these two never went to Pingnan. *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 170.

⁷ He left his post in Pingnan after being accused of corruption by rivals, but even after stepping down from the post of county magistrate, instead of coming back to his hometown in Changzhou 常州, he stayed in Pingnan for two more years to finish the first county gazetteer of Pingnan. See *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 185-186, 196-200.

⁸ The former county magistrate also sent a group of Gutian government students to the County School of Pingnan once the school was built. Magistrate Shen sent them back to Gutian, and replaced them with the new government students he admitted.

Magistrate Shen compiled.⁹ They donated to and led the construction in the county, and their names were carved on the stelae with their official titles.

Zhang Buqi of Jitou was one of the government students who played a leading role in constructing the county seat during the eighteenth century. The name of Jitou did not appear in any written records during the Ming Dynasty. Biographies of the Zhangs' ancestors in later genealogies stress repeatedly that their ancestors never joined the "bandits" during the Ming-Qing transition. However, their rise as a local military power is suggested by oral histories and a record in the genealogy of a neighboring village. These both claim that a chief from the Jitou Zhangs led more than 3,000 people to plunder this village in 1647.¹⁰ Zhang Buqi, who was born in the early eighteenth century, was the leader of Jitou during the period that the county seat was being constructed.¹¹ In a somewhat legendary description in the genealogy, we learn that after the county was established, he soon attained the status of government student through both military and civil examinations held in the county seat. He was invited by Magistrate Shen as the chief manager to build the city walls and also participated in building the Confucian temple and

⁹ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 166, 279–281.

¹⁰ *Qiantang Lin-shi zupu*, 6.

¹¹ His biography in the genealogy explains that his sudden wealth came from his wife's management abilities, but an episode described in a poem allegedly written by Zhang Buqi indirectly discloses the secret of his success. According to this poem, a mystical spring of salt erupted in Jitou during the quarantine period; this spring provided them with an endless supply of salt while the price of salt was high. When the quarantine ended, the spring was exhausted. For salt and other commodities, Pingnan was highly dependent on imports from the coastal area, either via the Gutian River to Gutian and Fuzhou, or via the Huotong River to Ningde. The sale of salt in Pingnan and Gutian was not monopolized by the government; this allowed local porters and petit merchants to transport salt from the coast and to sell it on their own. It is quite possible that during the sea quarantine when the coast was officially inaccessible, The Jitou Zhangs controlled the transport and sale of salt by smuggling or some other means and became rich as a result. This would not be surprising since The Jitou Zhangs were strong during the Ming-Qing transition and Jitou was on the route from Ningde to inner Pingnan. In oral histories, there is also a story about their ancestors earning a large amount of silver along the road that transported salt from Ningde. See *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 169–170; *Wanli Gutian xianzhi*, 5/35b-36b, *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 239.

charity school.¹² His name was listed as one of the eight assistants who helped Magistrate Shen compile the first gazetteer of Pingnan. Two of his three sons were government students, and one of them allegedly compiled the first genealogy of the Jitou Zhangs.¹³ After him, the history of the Jitou Zhangs was written from a completely different perspective. Histories no longer described the Zhangs of Jitou as descendants of local warlords but presented them as civilized gentry.

Magistrate Shen promoted certain local powers to help his administration, and local powers used endorsements from the magistrate during the transition to elevate their status. This alliance between officials and local families was recorded in the public spaces of this newly created center of administration. During Magistrate Shen's short term and sudden removal, at least four stelae were erected. Two were established by him for the construction of city walls and the expansion of the Temple of City God, and two were established by local elites for his establishment of charity school and the donation to support this school. Before this time, there were no stelae or inscriptions in Pingnan at all related to state or local government; these were the first stelae to display the name of an official and to broadcast the presence of official power. Formerly a village where "tigers gathered outside the walls," Shuangxi became a county seat that showcased official power.

While the inscriptions of these four stelae were all recorded in gazetteers, the only one that still survived was the stele that Pingnan candidates established to memorialize Magistrate Shen's contribution to build the charitable school. He donated his own salary to purchase the properties that sustained the school. The stele with the inscription "Memorial

¹² *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 169.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169–171.

for the Charitable Field” (*yitian beiji* 義田碑記), erected in 1738, still stands outside what is now an elementary school in Shuangxi. Although inscriptions on important stelae, especially those erected by the county magistrate, are often recorded in gazetteers, the texts in these two different media are not always the same. For example, in the gazetteer that was compiled by Magistrate Shen, the inscription of this stele was given a more flattering title: “Memorial for the Merits of Our Great Merciful Patron, Venerable Shen, Who Established the Charitable School” (*Da enzhu Shen gong dingjian yixue gongde beiji* 大恩主沈公鼎建義學功德碑記), and the names of these students, which are at the end of the inscription, were omitted. Apparently, in the gazetteer that Magistrate Shen compiled to prove his contribution in Pingnan and to counter the accusation of corruption, he needed to focus more on himself.¹⁴ Gazetteer compilers frequently changed or abridged the texts that they included from stelae. The most common case is the omission of the records of donors on monuments for construction or reconstruction. Compilers would also frequently embellish the prose. The essential difference between the stelae texts and genealogical texts is not a matter of content; rather, it is the media. The transcriptions of inscriptions in gazetteers were written or printed on paper and were produced to be circulated among a group of like-minded officials and gentries. Therefore, the most important aspects are stylish prose and flattering content. For inscriptions on stelae, the most important aspects are its physical presence at a specific space and what connects the text to its location. The local social network that the stele represents—the signatures of establishers and the names of donors, with all their titles—cannot be omitted but must be recorded in detail.

¹⁴ “Da enzhu Shen gong dingjian yixue gongde beiji,” *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 196. Also see *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi*, 22.

Shuangxi was not the most prosperous town in Pingnan before it became the county seat, but after the transformation of its political role, it was here that most stelae were located. Local officials often erected a stele after the renovation of public buildings or other infrastructure, and some of these stelae even survived the destructive Cultural Revolution.¹⁵ Because of its relatively short history as a political center and its distance from political and economic hubs, Shuangxi has fewer stelae than most county seats. However, these stelae are all well-made, are impressive in their size, and feature good calligraphy (Figure 11). The name of Magistrate Shen repeatedly appears, while these inscriptions, following the standard pattern, traced the history of building by the term of county magistrate. In addition to current donors and managers, inscriptions sometimes list the names of managers in previous renovations. For example, the back side of the stele for the renovation of the Confucian Temple in 1787 lists the names of more than one hundred donors, the amount they donated, and their titles, ordered according to the amount donated. Most donors had the title of government student or something higher, and they came from various villages in Pingnan. At the end of the inscription on the front side, in addition to four current managers, the current county magistrate, the assistant county magistrate, and the assistant instructor in the county school, the names of ten managers in the previous construction appear in a parallel list beside the list of the current managers. Zhang Buqi's name is on the list of the past managers, his contribution was the second highest, and his name appears second on the back side.¹⁶ On the 1821 stele for the renovation of the

¹⁵ These are: two for the reconstructions of Confucian Temple in 1787 and 1837, one for the reconstruction of the Temple of the City God in 1821, one for the construction of a dam on the river running around the county seat in 1892, and one for the donation of property to the charitable school in 1758.

¹⁶ “Congxiu wenmiao luocheng ji 重修文廟落成記.”

Temple of City God, the managers' names of the renovation in 1779 and in 1800 are also comprehensively listed.¹⁷ These stelae attest to the repeated cooperation between local officials and local gentry and confirm the stability of official-gentry alliances under the aegis of imperial governance.

These stelae in front of or around official and public buildings transformed the space of Shuangxi from a village to the county seat. With the construction of several buildings endorsed by political authority, such as the Confucian Temple, Shuangxi was made into the new political center of this “barbarian” county. For powerful families newly rising in this new county, putting their names on these solemn stelae beside the names of the county magistrates, under the characters “Great Qing” (“*da Qing*” 大清, or sometimes “*huang Qing*” 皇清), was the most effective way to openly justify their new position under a new administrative institution.

¹⁷ “Chenghuang miao beiji 城隍廟碑記.”



Figure 11 Stele for the reconstruction of the Confucian temple, Shuangxi

Wooden Plaques and Commemorative Arches in Villages

The county seat was not the only arena that featured displays of state power; the gentry also brought visible evidence of state power back to their villages. Wooden plaques granted by county magistrates and other officials became popular starting in the mid-eighteenth century. Receivers exhibited these plaques by hanging them on the front doors of their residences. Zhang Buqi, for example, was proud to receive three wooden plaques from three different county magistrates, respectively,¹⁸ and some families were particularly proud to receive wooden plaques over the consecutive generations. These plaques were made to celebrate the receipt of either official degrees or other honors, such as longevity or philanthropy, and were signed by local officials with their full titles.

¹⁸ *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 169.

Several villages, such as Jitou, Tangkou, and Jixia, are proud to have so many wooden plaques displayed in their villages (Figure 12).



Figure 12 Wooden plaque, “Five Generations in a House,” hung above a main hall, Jitou

Only men were awarded wooden plaques by local officials. Because women could not earn official degrees, they did not receive wooden plaques, but women were celebrated for their chastity by commemorative arches. Female chastity had been used as a method of political and social control since the Ming Dynasty,¹⁹ but it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that Pingnan reported to the local government that any of its women deserved to be recognized as chaste models. However, local people soon became enthusiastic about competing for this official honor and getting permission to build the

¹⁹ Fei Siyen 費絲言, *You dianfan dao guifan: cong Mingdai zhenjie lienü de bianshi yu liuchuan kan zhenjie guannian de yangehua* 由典範到規範：從明代貞節列女的辨識與流傳看貞節觀念的嚴格化 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 1998) and Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

commemorative arches for chaste widows. From the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century, more than five hundred and thirty names were listed in a section for “chaste widows” in local gazetteers. They were all reported to the local government, and some of them were canonized by the state, from the earliest chaste widow—a widow who lived in Jitou in 1758—to those living in the early twentieth century.²⁰ Jitou, the village famous for its high number of degree-holders and wooden plaques granted by local officials, also took pride in its eleven commemorative arches for chaste widows that were built from 1792 to 1888.²¹ Some smaller and remote villages, such as Menli and Boyuan 柏源, also had one or two huge commemorative arches on the main road to their villages (Figure 13).



Figure 13 Commemorative arch for chaste widow at the entrance to Boyuan Village

²⁰ *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi* 民國屏南縣志, 28/2–50.

²¹ Liu Jie 劉杰 and Zhou Fengfang 周芬芳 eds., *Xiangtu Pingnan* 鄉土屏南 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2009), 166–168.



Figure 14 “Sacred decree” tablets from the tops of two destroyed commemorative arches in Jitou

The commemorative arches for chaste widows in Pingnan all had similar structures. Most of them were made of stone and fully decorated. Usually at least four tablets with inscriptions were placed on the façade. The highest tablet was smaller in size with only two characters, “Sacred Decree” (*shengzhi* 聖旨, Figure 14), indicating that the canonization of this chaste widow was granted by the emperor. Below it was a stone tablet with a four-character set phrase that praised the virtue of the widow. On the left and right were two smaller square tablets with the date of canonization and the names of the widow and her husband. On the four columns, two pairs of couplets were carved. In other words, the façade of the commemorative arch was indeed filled with carved words. These arches were always placed across the main road of villages, particularly the road into the villages, so that anyone entering the village would be impressed by the imperially endorsed morality of their women. The stone arches were usually taken as a collective symbol of the whole lineage or village at a time when the kinship unit and residential unit were mostly the same. By contrast, wooden plaques mostly belonged to a specific family or lineage branch. In

some cases, wooden plaques granted by local officials were exhibited in the ancestral shrine, but in many villages of Pingnan, wooden plaques belonged to the families of the recipients' descendants.

If a time traveler were to visit Jitou or other major villages such as Tangkou in the 1720s and again in the 1820s, the most striking difference he first recognized would be that in the 1820s, many texts were displayed in public, and they featured names paired with officials' names or the reigns of emperors. Before entering the village, he or she would have to pass through several three-to-four-meter-high stone arches with façades decorated with stone tablets and columns with caplets—all these elements would be carved with words. After entering the village, this time traveler would notice numerous wooden plaques hung upon the architraves of the front gates of the houses along the main road of the village. These houses were the residences of major families in this village whose members either passed the county examinations or purchased an official degree. By publicly displaying a “sacred decree” or the names and titles of local officials, these texts constructed a space that recalled the presence of the state, which otherwise would not have been seen by our imaginary time traveler in Jitou in the 1720s.

Displaying Communities

If stelae and various forms of displayed texts exhibited authority, the presence of state or local government was certainly not the only authority on display in everyday life in Pingnan. From the mid-eighteenth century on, many stelae were erected in front of or inside temples and shrines, at the entrances to covered bridges, and on the side of main

roads. Most stelae were erected in front of public buildings or at transportation spots, and by local families without the participation of officials. While similar stelae can be seen in almost all the other counties in China, those for the construction of bridges evidence regional features in Pingnan.

Marking the Scope of Influence

Because of Pingnan's landscape, bridges played a special role there. Settlements and transportation routes are along river valleys; since most rivers in this area were not navigable and mountain paths were crooked and narrow, people relied on porters to carry necessities back to villages across bridges over rapid rivers. Because of their importance in sustaining villagers' daily life and as open spaces where people frequently passed and congregated, bridges in Pingnan were not only utilized for transportation but were also charged with religious significance. Many bridges in Pingnan were covered and made of wood, and many feature an altar. Religious cults were cultivated on the bridges. Some bridges were situated at the center of settlements, others were understood as the boundaries of villages.

Because of the role of bridges in both the economic and the religious life of Pingnan, they became sites where local families competed or cooperated with one another, and the results of competition or cooperation were recorded on the stele associated with the construction or the reconstruction of bridges. While stelae for various buildings were similar, stelae for bridges were particularly important at this point in Pingnan, especially for bridges beyond the villages. Unlike temples or shrines in the villages, bridges on transportation routes did not belong to any village and were openly utilized by everyone who crossed them. A bridge was usually related to the wealth of the citizenry of various

villages, and its reconstruction involved inter-village negotiation. In this region where settlements were dispersed, the inter-village alliance of ritual was relatively weak, and few large-scale projects, such as dikes, dams, or other forms of water-control management, had to be carried out cooperatively.²² To expand their common economic base, bridge-building became a public affair that people in different villages had to participate in and an arena in which their power relationships were projected and evolved.

Although few bridge stelae erected before the mid-eighteenth century survive, the differences between earlier and later bridge stelae are obvious. The inscriptions from the few remnants of earlier bridge stelae are simple, and their carving is of relatively poor quality. They display the donors' names—mostly coming from a single family and sometimes with the participation of female members—and the donors' hopes for earning good merit from the bridge construction. Apparently, there were religious motives behind these inscriptions. For example, one inscription carved on the pier of a bridge in Changqiao 長橋 in 1090 reads: “The disciple Jiang Zhen 江稹 donates thirteen *guan* of money and thirty-four *dan* of grain to build this stone pier, in order to make good karma for my parents and to plead for safety and peacefulness for my whole family and myself; respectfully carved in the ninth month of the fifth year of Yuanyou 元佑.”²³ Another one, from 1258, states that the bridge was built with grain that “faithful men and women saved during the three-year worship of Buddha.”²⁴ A much later one, from 1786, has similar content. It

²² Zheng, Zhenman, “Ming-Qing Fujian yanhai shuili zhidu yu xiangzu zuzhi 明清福建沿海水利制度與鄉族組織” in *Xiangzu yu guojia: duoyuan shiye zhong de Min-Tai chuanguotong shehui* 鄉族與國家：多元視野中的閩台傳統社會 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2009), 51-65.

²³ This inscription can still be seen in Changqiao and is recorded in *Pingnan gudai qiaoliang* 屏南古代橋樑 (Pingnan: Pingnan xian wenshi zhiliao weiyuanhui, 2003), 7.

²⁴ *Pingnan gudai qiaoliang*, 70.

states that a woman, along with her son, her son's wife, and her grandson, built this bridge for the prosperity of their descendants.²⁵ Displayed in public, these inscriptions reflect personal beliefs or Buddhist sentiments.

In later stelae for the construction of bridges, declarations of personal wishes continued to be inscribed, but interest in publicity was much stronger. Resembling those erected jointly by local officials and gentry, these stelae were formally built and carefully carved and sometimes feature stylish prose written by local degree-holders. Some of the texts, such as the one composed by Zhou Daquan 周大權 of Tangkou in 1820 and the one composed by Zhang Qinqi 張欽奇 of Jitou in the same year, were recorded in the gazetteer compiled in 1826. Significantly, of all the gazetteers, the local gentry participated most in the compilation of this 1826 gazetteer. This circumstance shows the local gentry's interest in circulating these inscriptions among the group of officials and literati.²⁶ The inscriptions of these stelae all include the lists of managers and donors. The managers were by and large degree-holders from major families, and their names were ranked according to the level of their degrees. The donors were also recorded and ordered by the amount of their donation, the level of their official degree, and the villages they came from.

These stelae for the construction of bridge or other buildings, such as temples, pavilions, or shrines, were surely a kind of medium to show the local power. These carefully arranged lists illustrate that at this moment, in this community, these were the

²⁵ Ibid., 43.

²⁶ Zhou Daquan, "Qiansheng qiao beiji 千乘橋碑記," and Zhang Qinqi, "Baixiang qiao beiji 百祥橋碑記," *Daoguang Pingnan xianzhi* 道光屏南縣志, 51, 53. Of course, only the prose texts were recorded, the lists of donors were omitted.

significant individuals who could be counted on to lead public affairs and who had the ability to contribute. It also provides a model for how much one might consider donations to public benefits. These stelae are anything but neutral records of the participants in public affairs. Instead, they provide a permanent announcement of the consequence of particular negotiations among local powers—a confirmation of a result whose influence was supposed to last through an unchangeable medium.

For major families, claiming a leadership role in bridge-building was a way to exercise their power and extend it beyond their residential villages. From the time of their success in the civil examinations, the Jitou Zhangs became one of the most zealous lineages in building bridges along important transportation routes. In 1808, the grandson of Zhang Buqi, a tribute student from Jitou, led the reconstruction of Jinzao 金造 Bridge (Figure 15), a bridge on the route from Jitou to other villages in southern and southeastern Pingnan that burned in 1805.²⁷ The project was completed in 1810 with an altar to a bodhisattva inside, and two stelae were erected at the entrance of the bridge. One was the full list of donors' names (Figure 16), and the other was a celebratory essay and the new regulations for the use of the bridge.²⁸ All five “leading managers” (*shoushi* 首事) listed on the stele of donors' names came from two branches of the Jitou Zhangs, and eighteen “assistant deputies” (*xieyuan* 協緣) came from villages near and far, including a government student from the Zhou of Tangkou, a tribute student from the Xue 薛 of Shuangxi, which was then the county seat, and a deputy from the Wei family in Zhongyang 忠洋, a powerful family in southeastern Pingnan. This group of managers promulgated

²⁷ *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 291.

²⁸ The two stelae still stood at the entrance of the bridge. Alos see *Pingnan gudai qiaoliang*, 20-22.

regulations on the use of the bridge and had them carved on the other stele. For example, in order to prevent fire, the storage of hay or firewood was banned from the bridge. A list of fifty-three donors' names, ordered according to the amount of the donation, was carved on another stele with the donors' titles and the villages they came from. At the top of the list are the four who donated the most: the eldest son of Zhang Buqi, who was then an added student (*zengsheng* 增生); two of Zhang Buqi's grandsons, both tribute students (*gongsheng* 貢生); and a widow representing her husband in Jitou. Following these four were other donors from fifteen villages. The eighteen assistant deputies from different villages did not all have their names on the donors' list; this is an indication that their reputation and leadership in various villages earned them this place, not the donation they made.



Figure 15 Jinzao Bridge²⁹

²⁹ Because of the construction of a dam, the bridge has moved from its original location in 2005. The bridge was partly reconstructed, but the original structure was kept, including the altar to a bodhisattva.



Figure 16 Stele for the list of donors for Jinzao Bridge (1810)

In 1820, another government student from Jitou, who was also a great-grandson of Zhang Buqi, continued his father's task of leading the reconstruction of Baixiang 百祥 Bridge. This bridge had been previously built and rebuilt several times with the help of the local population, but it was destroyed by a flood in the early nineteenth century. The student's father was elected by eighteen nearby villages to conduct the reconstruction, but he died before the project was complete. This government student wrote an essay to celebrate the reconstruction of Baixiang Bridge; his text was recorded in the gazetteer compiled in the 1820s and carved on a stela that stands at the entrance of this bridge. In 1852, to sustain the bridge, sixteen leaders from various villages and various branches of

lineages collected money to buy a forest near the bridge for the future renovation of Baixiang Bridge. They agreed that this forest was left for the bridge, and “people in nearby villages and descendants of surnames in this public agreement” could not cut the trees for their own use. The sixteen leaders also established a foundation. Every year they gathered to weed the wild grass in the forest on the First Day of Winter (*lidong* 立冬), and their lunch was paid by the interests from this foundation—this communal activity continued until the early communist era. This agreement was also carved on the stele as a communal agreement. This idea was initiated by a gentleman with the surname Su 蘇, who had no official title and did not belong to any of the major families in this area. Yet his name appears on the list as the third leader; it follows the name of a grandson of Zhang Buqi from Jitou, who was then an assistant instructor at the Prefectural School of Xinghua 興化, and another government student from Jitou.³⁰ This arrangement on the stele shows that local leadership took priority over the monetary contributions in local politics.

If we take bridge-building and the collective agreement around it as a historical event with collaboration and negotiation behind it, the stele provides a medium for transforming the presence of this event into a written record and extending its result into subsequent generations. The symbolic value of these stelae was therefore to sustain the presence of certain dominant groups in the public space. What the “public” comprises here is certainly relative. In the cases of bridge-building and the Jitou Zhangs—or more

³⁰ *Pingnan gudai qiaoliang*, 16-19. In 1894, this bridge was reconstructed again after a fire. This reconstruction was led by the great-great-grandson of Zhang Buqi, a government student, together with four higher degree-holders from four other villages. In 2006, this bridge, which had been appointed by the government as a cultural heritage, burned down, and its reconstruction became an important issue among the Jitou Zhangs. Since modern paved roads had changed the traditional transportation roads, the cultural significance—the bridge was taken as a symbol of the cultural heritage and local achievement of the Zhangs’ ancestors, especially the descendants of Zhang Buqi—was the primary concern and not its actual function as a transport node.

precisely, the descendants of Zhang Buqi—the public that they dealt with concerned several related villages in this region. Thus, the stele bearing their names as the primary leaders marked the scope of their influence outside their residential villages.

Differentiation and Collaboration

In addition to bridges, in the nineteenth century, the Jitou Zhangs built eight pavilions on the routes in different directions to Jitou, which marked the scope of their influence more visually.³¹ On other occasions, different scales of public, as well as different community levels, would be defined. For example, five stelae were erected for the renovation of the Temple of Five Manifestations (*wuxian miao* 五顯廟), the principal temple of a thriving village, Changfen 長汾, in the nineteenth century: one each in 1810, 1837, and 1879, and two in 1855. The inscription on the first stele has the title “Stele Publicly Erected by Three Surnames” (*Sanxing gongli bei* 三姓公立碑, Figure 12). This defines the composition of this community: families of three surnames—Ye 葉, Huang 黃, and Lu 陸—dominated this village. In this and the following stelae, the three leading managers bore each of these three surnames, and so did the lists of donors. Although families represented by at least two surnames had a temple of their own—both the Lu and the Ye had a Temple of Lady Linshui 臨水夫人 that only members of their own lineage worshipped and made donations to—the Temple of Five Manifestations was worshipped and financially supported by all three. This pattern was maintained for all the stelae erected in the nineteenth century.

³¹ These pavilions were established for passengers, especially for porters, who played an important role in carrying commodities until the construction of paved roads in the twentieth century.



Figure 17 “Stele Publicly Erected by Three Surnames,” Temple of Five Manifestations, Changfeng

Meanwhile, at the Temple of Lady Linshui worshipped by the Changfen Lus, the stele titled “Stele Publicly Erected by the Surname Lu” (*Luxing gongli bei* 陸姓公立碑) was erected in 1859 for the construction of this temple and the expansion of the family’s ancestral shrine. Since all the donors came from the Lus in Changfen, their surname was omitted from the list. Apparently, this stele was erected to maintain the information shared among the members of the Lu family; the surname was assumed and did not need to appear. Although the Temple of Five Manifestations and the Temple of Lady Linshui are in the same village and geographically very close, by using various titles and different lists of donors, the stelae highlight the exclusivity and unity of particular groups. The different

worshipping communities were not created by these stelae, but these permanent stelae reified their demarcation.

While the stelae in Changfen evidence the local order in a multi-surname village, two stelae erected for the renovation of the Temple of Lady Ma (*Mashi xiangong* 馬氏仙宮) in Jixia demonstrate another level of cooperation and differentiation in a single-surname village. Lady Ma was worshipped in southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian during the late imperial period, and most of her temples were situated in the mountain area.³² She shared similar features with a group of female deities, such as the Lady Linshui and the Heavenly Goddess (*mazu* 媽祖). Starting in the middle period, these deities were popular, efficacious witches and evolved to become regional, or even national, deities during the late imperial period.³³ According to oral histories in Jixia and a short “biography” written in one of the copies of the Gans’ genealogies,³⁴ their ancestors brought her from their hometown in southern Zhejiang during the Ming Dynasty, and therefore the Temple of the Lady Ma in Jixia was the “original temple” in this region. Her seven young sisters were worshipped in other villages in Pingnan, but of course, the one in Jixia was the superior one. The role of the Temple of the Lady Ma in Jixia was flexible. On the one hand, there was once a ritualistic tour for the Lady Ma to visit her sisters’ temples. During the tour, the parading statue of the Lady Ma in Jixia was carried to seven temples of her sisters in seven

³² Barend ter Haar, “The Genesis and Spread of Temple Cults in Fukien,” in E.B. Vermeer ed., *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 349–396.

³³ Li Ren-Yuan, “Cong Mingdai shiliao kan linshui furen xinyang de zaoqi fazhan 從明代史料看臨水夫人信仰的早期發展,” presented at The First Conference on the Culture of the Lady Linshui, Gutian, Fujian, October 6, 2011.

³⁴ See “Ma-shi tianxian quanzhuan 馬氏天仙全傳” in *Gan-shi zhipu* 甘氏支譜, 29–33. This is a selection from the 1914 genealogy and copied in 1964. The “Biography of the Heavenly Fairly of Lady Ma” was attached in the end as a supplement.

villages in southern Pingnan.³⁵ The surname Gan did not dominate most of these villages; indeed, many did not have any families with the surname Gan. In this sense, the Lady of Ma was a regional deity, and the temple in Jixia is the highest one in the hierarchy.³⁶ On the other hand, the Temple of the Lady Ma in Jixia was a temple for all the Gan families. Situated in the physical center of Jixia, the temple was not only the spiritual center of the Jixia Gans but also one connecting the Gan families in this region. The stelae of this temple, which still stands, make this clear.

Lineage-based buildings in Jixia underwent a series of constructions and reconstructions in the early nineteenth century. In 1814, the Gan genealogy was revised, and during the same period, the descendants of the founding ancestor's eldest son constructed an ancestral shrine that regularized the ritual of ancestral worship for the eldest son. In 1827, the descendants of the founding ancestor renovated his grave and established a stele to commemorate the renovation. Soon after, the descendants of the founding ancestor's second son rebuilt a large house as the ancestral shrine for the second son and created a register for the shrine that noted the details of the worship ritual. They also renovated the second son's grave and erected a stele.³⁷ During the early nineteenth century, however, the construction of the shrines for the founding ancestor's first and second sons,

³⁵ It was, and still is, common for local temples to have two statues of their main deity. One "parading statue" is smaller and easy to carry on tours. The other large "sitting statue" remains in the temple.

³⁶ The tour of Lady Ma was relatively unusual in Pingnan. Many of the temples here held the tour of "sharing the incense" (*fexiang* 分香) from their original temple, in order to keep their efficacy, and some of them revived this tour after the 1980s. For example, many Temples of the Lady Linshui, became very popular in Pingnan because the original temple is in Gutian; thus, they hold an annual tour to spare the incense from the original temple in Daqiao 大橋 of Gutian, and some Temples of the Great Sage Reaching to the Heaven (*qitian dasheng* 齊天大聖) have an annual tour to the original temple in the neighboring county Jian'ou 建甌. Although the Temple of Lady Ma claimed to have its original temple in Jingning 景寧 County in southern Zhejiang, villagers never participated in a tour to spare the incense.

³⁷ *Bohai-jun Ganshi zupu*, 101–102.

the arranging of rituals of worship for them, and the renovations of their graves suggests a wave of lineage-building involving a subtle tension between two sets of surname groups—one claiming to be the descendants of the founding ancestor's first son, the other claiming to be descendants of the second son. These two descendant groups solidified themselves by rearranging the respective rituals and ritual spaces and, at the same time, creating texts for open display.

The cause of the tension between these two groups in the early nineteenth century is unclear,³⁸ but the renovation of the Temple of the Lady Ma in 1841 clearly involved the cooperation between the branches of the first son and the second son after this wave of lineage consolidation. Moreover, they also invited the Gansin other villages to join in the renovation of the spiritual center of their lineage. Two stelae were erected for this renovation. One, entitled “Inscription of [Donors from] Our Village” (*benxiang beiji* 本鄉碑記), lists the donors of Jixia according to donation amount, and whether the donors belonged to the descendants of the first or the second son is not mentioned at all. The other, entitled “Inscription of Emigrant [Donors]” (*yiju beiji* 移居碑記), lists the donors who had emigrated from Jixia and were living in other villages. This list is led by a representative

³⁸ An oral history, probably created by the descendants of the second son, claims that it was the second son, instead of the first son, who used his wit to save their father from being accused of privately building city walls with the intention of rebellion. In a normal condition, the descendants of the first son were usually the leader of the entire lineage organization, or least had a prestigious position in lineage affairs. This story emphasizes on the contribution of the second son, and attempts to promote the status of the descendants of the second son. Although this well-known story is not adopted by the official genealogy, it provides an alternative version of family history to promote the status of the group labelled as “the descendants of the second son,” so that it could compete with the other group, which had been labelled as “descendants of the first son.” According to the genealogy, the founding father of Jixia had four sons, but the descendants of the other two sons either diminished or moved out of the Jixia and settled in other villages in northeastern Fujian. In the mid-twentieth century, villagers built a hall to perform the ritual of ancestral worship together. The name of this hall, “Hall of Harmonious Combination” (*Hebi tang* 合璧堂), suggested the fact of separation and the attempt to amend it. However, everyone living in current Jixia still can clearly differentiate who the descendants of the first son were and who the descendants of the second son were.

from Menli, who not only donated money but also bought a field for the temple. Lying almost on the western border of Pingnan, the Menli Gans were far from Jixia. Nevertheless, they were a powerful group and even compiled their own genealogy in 1866. The donors in this list of “emigrants” came from fourteen different places: from Yangtouzhai, a small village north of Jixia; from the Pingnan county seat in the far north; from the Jiangyang 建陽 county seat; and from several villages in Gutian. Some of these Gan had their own temple of the Lady Ma in their villages, such as the Yangtouzai Gans, but many of them did not worship the Lady Ma back in their own residence. For example, the main temple for the Menli Gans was the Temple of the Lady Linshui. Similarly, on the donors’ list for the Lus’ Temple of the Lady Linshui in Changfen, the surname Gan was omitted except for a few names at the end for whom other surnames are listed—these might be affinal relatives or just common worshippers of the Lady Ma. This omission indicates that these stelae were erected for the members of the lineage, but unlike the Changfen Lus, these members were dispersed across a vast region covering three counties. These stelae stated that this space was a center of a dispersed community, in which people were organized under the principle of lineage. In the case of this renovation, the Lady Ma, instead of a regional deity, was the deity for the Gan lineage, and the scope was not confined spatially to Jixia. Instead, it included all the Gan families in a wider region connected by the supposed bond of blood relationships. These two stelae in front of the temple present the scope of an extended lineage, loosely organized and dispersed across Pingnan and nearby counties. Only a few decades later, as I show in the previous chapter, a lineage member in Jixia tried to organize them by compiling a genealogy to include all of them.

From bridges to temples, the construction of public buildings became a big event among local communities, as well as a field for them to collaborate or compete. The new hierarchy of power was confirmed in these events with the participation of major families and their leaders. While different buildings involved different sets of community members, these results were inscribed on stones and were expected to last forever.

Conclusion: The Public of Letters

For different purposes and for different audiences, there were many ways to display texts in an open space. Writings on beams or columns of buildings were very common in Pingnan. Auspicious couplets written on columns are still popular even now in Pingnan and elsewhere in China. In addition to auspicious couplets, which might be changed every year, as a new public building was completed, it was usual for donors, *fengshui* masters, carpenters, and other craftsmen to write their names on beams and columns. These names publicized their personal contribution to constructing the building; sometimes these people's wishes were inscribed alongside their names. For example, on the beams of a bridge in Longtan 龍潭, a government student, who took charge of writing words on the beams while the bridge was built, wrote: "The beam-writer, Chen Jitang 陳際唐, a government student from the village, wishes to succeed in the civil examinations and to be exalted"³⁹ (Figure 13). Sometimes these words were written or carved on wooden boards. For example, a small wooden plate was hung from a beam in the Temple of the Lady Ma in

³⁹ The original phrase is "Shuliang bencun xiangsheng Chen Jitang weiyuan gongmin xianda 書樑本村庠生 陳際唐惟願功名顯達."

Jixia (Figure 14). This wooden plate with carved words was made in 1831 by three villagers, and briefly notes that their ancestor in the fourth generation donated a piece of land to the temple to pray for his father's "early ascendance to heaven." These open words addressed to "heaven" were tied to a long history rooted in religious tradition.



Figure 18 Government student's writing on the beam: "Wishing to Succeed"



Figure 19 Wooden board hung on the beam of the Temple of Lady Ma

However, compared to writing on beams or carving on wooden plates, erecting a stele consumed considerably more resources. Instead of personal messages like those discussed above, the inscriptions on stone stelae in Pingnan during this period are mostly

formal, address the public, and concern organizational powers. The narrators in these stone inscriptions are not speaking for themselves. Instead, they are making proclamations on behalf of a greater collectivity: the state, “their” Pingnan, their village, or their lineage. Practically the only kind of stelae displayed in Pingnan before the eighteenth century was tombstones established for ancestors’ graves.⁴⁰ Until ancestral shrines became prevalent, it was at ancestral grave sites that lineage members practiced the most important communal ritual—the ritual of ancestral worship. Since the establishment of Pingnan County, establishing stone stelae became increasingly common at various sites to commemorate various occasions, such as the construction of a Confucian Temple in the county seat, the reconstruction of a bridge, or the renovation of a temple in a village. While gravesites were mostly located away from the settlements, these stone stelae for public buildings were erected near people’s daily activities.

The transformation of the power structure in Pingnan stimulated the further proliferation of stelae in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The imperial policy to enhance the administration in southeastern China created a new county government in Pingnan. After the violent dynastic transition and the redistribution of power, local families sought to rebuild their power bases; taking advantage of state endorsements, they legitimized their dominance. Civil examinations introduced a group of government students from major families who were familiar with the literary skills required for producing stylish prose. Under these circumstances, local officials started to use formal stelae in the county seat during the mid-eighteenth century. These stelae mark the presence

⁴⁰ Some tombstones could be traced to the sixteenth century, but many were re-erected during the general trend of lineage-building in the nineteenth century.

of state power and the alliance between officials and local gentry. From the nineteenth century, this practice was adopted by local families, who erected stelae in their own villages or on primary transportation routes to publicize their prestigious status and the strength of their coalitions with one another.

Erecting a stele became a conventional practice in Pingnan. Officials and gentry felt the need to leave records in stone of public events for posterity that included descriptive words and listed information about participants. Villagers realized the importance of these stones and became accustomed to seeing these solemn stelae and inscriptions as they went about their business, both in a public space in the county seat and in their own villages. When Magistrate Shen, a capable official from Jiangnan, first arrived in the new county, he complained that people in Pingnan were “no different from barbarians” because they never went to the county seat and had no concept of what a government was.⁴¹ But in the nineteenth century, villagers felt the presence of state authority in their own villages, through the characters “*huangqing*” (皇清, “the imperial Qing”) carved near the top of the stelae, which did not appear on previous stelae, through the signature of magistrates and other local officials, and through the titles that were placed on the names of members from powerful families. However, to some extent, the physical presence of these stelae was no less important than the content of the inscriptions. It was the hugeness and solemnity of the stone that distinguished them from other forms of texts in public display, such as the written signatures on the beams of a bridge or a temple. Even the illiterate villagers could grasp the authority behind these heavy stones. The appearance of these texts, together with

⁴¹ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 163–164.

their medium, changed the nature of “public space” and redefined it with political implications.

Stone stelae were not used only by the government and did not symbolize only the presence of the state. Local people, especially powerful families, also learned to use this particular medium. Stone stelae were used to celebrate local events supported by powerful families. Solutions to local disputes and communal regulations were also inscribed on stone stelae and addressed to the public. Although most stone stelae in Pingnan we can see now were celebratory, many stelae were regulatory, such as the stelae of the Jinzao Bridge that listed the regulations on the use of the bridge. However, both celebratory and regulatory stelae shared similar logics. They were both placed in an open space, and everyone could access them. They were supposed to “last forever,” and their contents were supposed to be unchanged. Their credibility was supported by the authority that erected them and granted the contents.

The role of stelae and public texts in Pingnan urges us to reconsider the nature of texts in local society. Historians are used to decoding the meaning of text and tracing the intention of its creator, and the historians of reading have discovered that the way texts are read by the readers is as important as the author’s intent. Texts are made meaningful by being read by their readers, who create meanings for them. However, those texts on stelae show that the meanings of texts are not necessarily created by being read. Their physical presence could itself be full of meaning. Among many texts not created to be read, stone inscriptions are outstanding by their strong physical presence. Unlike many texts that have specific intended readers, these stelae on the side of the road or in front of a temple are visible to the public—their readership is not restricted. In a village where most people were

illiterate, these carefully carved texts were not intended to be comprehended by the majority. The reason that the stele erectors did not stop producing more stelae was that the multi-“readerships” of these public texts were realized. Officials and well-educated local government students would read the oratorical essays carved on the front of stelae and even copied them into personal collections or local gazetteers. To them, these texts were a medium to show their cultural capitals, sharing the common identity of literati. Less literate leaders of local families would seek their or their ancestors’ names from the lists of donors, usually carved at the end of essays or on the back of stelae. These supposedly unchanging public records became the evidence of their inherited dominance. Most illiterate villagers could not read either the essays or the lists, but they could understand the significance of these texts. Although literate villagers might orally explain the content to the illiterate ones, what was more important was the symbolic presence of these texts in the form of officially recognized stelae and established by local authorities. To different people with different literacies, public texts produce different meanings and different levels of commonality.

For most villagers, the meaning of these public texts came from not only the texts themselves but also the authority behind them. On the one hand, the effectiveness of the stelae was created by the authority who erected them, be it the magistrate or a stipend student from a powerful family. On the other hand, the presence of these stelae in public space spatially and temporally extended the influence of the authorities. The interlocking relationship between them was intriguing. As the power structure changed, these public texts may lose their importance. Therefore, the most important question we have to ask from seeing a public text is, besides its content, who authorizes this text and makes it meaningful in public?

In the case of Pingnan, the force behind the popularization of stelae and many other public texts since the mid-eighteenth century was the collaboration between the state and local families. These public texts remodeled the characteristics of public space in Pingnan, not only in the county seat, which started out as a village but was soon filled with public buildings, but also in villages without any official bureaus. Of course, religious institutions and lineage institutions were also the authorities behind several public texts or stelae. However, in Pingnan it started with the establishment of the new government.



Figure 20 Maoist slogan painted on the wall of a former ancestral shrine in Jixia during the Cultural Revolution

When the authority changed, the significance of public texts also changed. For example, commemorative arches in Jitou and many stelae in Shuangxi were mostly destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Instead, a new kind of text was displayed in the villages: excerpts from *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, which were posted and painted in

public buildings (Figure 15). In order to prevent the destruction of their ancestral shrines, the residents in Jixia claim that they had to paint Chairman Mao's words on their walls. However, some of the cultural significance of the texts may extend beyond the political field. Many stelae as well as wooden plaques that were previously hidden are now proudly displayed once again as symbols of cultural heritage. Even though the texts and their medium have not changed, they have taken on new cultural meanings within the different social and political milieu of a new era.

Chapter 6

Economy: Texts in Property Management and Trades

Large portions of the written documents found in Chinese villages are related to economic activities, such as land contracts, account books, or promissory notes. Among them, contracts are the easiest to find and earn the most attention from historians who are interested in the economic life of traditional China. Historians began to realize the values of these contracts and deeds in the early twentieth century. Following the surveys by Japanese scholars in northern China, contracts and deeds were collected and published on different scales, from a broader administrative region, such as Fujian Province or Huizhou Prefecture, to a smaller geographical or economic unit, such as the Qingshui 清水 River Valleys or the Zigong 自貢 salt yard.¹ These collections have become crucial materials for exploring economic activities in the Chinese past.

Historians with different interests each have their own way of studying these documents. For Marxist historians, who are particularly interested in socioeconomic relationships and the transformation of private property, numerous land contracts during the late imperial period provide sources for exploring the historical development of Chinese society from the perspective of land ownership. After the debates over “the

¹ History Department, Fujian Normal University 福建師範大學歷史系 ed., *Ming-Qing Fujian jingji qiyue xuanji* 明清福建經濟契約選輯 (Beijing: Renmin, 1997); Wang Yuxin 王鈺欣 and Zhou Shaoquan 周紹泉 eds., *Huizhou qiannian qiyue wenshu* 徽州千年契約文書 (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi, 1993); Wang Yingqiang 王應強 et al. eds., *Qingshuijiang wenshu* 清水江文書 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2007-2011); Zigong shi dang'an guan 自貢市檔案館, ed., *Zigong yanye qiyue dang'an xuanji, 1732-1949* 自貢鹽業契約檔案選輯, 1732-1949 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1985).

sprouting of Chinese capitalism,” Chinese Marxist historians, starting in the late 1970s, were especially interested in exploring the historical relationships among landlords, tenants and serfs. After the examination of numerous land deeds and contracts, a popular view has developed depicting a general transformation of farmers from serfs to contracted tenants during the Ming-Qing transition. Tenants paid rent to landlords in cash or grain and acquired the right to use the land. Landlords were able to move this capital into the market and contracted tenants also had more autonomy to flexibly manage their production, maximize profits, and join the market economy.² Marxist historians took these contracts as the key for studying socioeconomic relationships and, more generally, the development of Chinese society in Marxist schemes.

Scholars of legal history who take contracts as legal documents place them in the context of legal culture and property rights. The role of the state is usually a primary consideration in this approach, especially its role in the enforcement of contracts. Using legal cases and other materials, legal historians discuss issues such as whether or not contracts could be taken as legal evidence during court disputes, whether the officially approved “red contracts” were more credible than “white contracts,” which were not officially registered and sealed,³ and whether the red or the white contracts were taken as the assessment of property tax by fiscal systems. The implications behind this approach also come from comparison to the western model: property rights as a crucial factor of modern capitalist society. In recent studies, scholars tend to suggest that, even without

² Ye Xian'en 葉顯恩, *Ming-Qing Huizhou nongcun shehui yu dianpu zhi* 明清徽州農村社會與佃僕制 (Hefei: Anhui renmin, 1983), especially the sixth chapter, and Yang Gouzhen, *Ming-Qing tudi qiye wenshu yanjiu*, especially the second chapter.

³ The name of “red contracts” came from the red stamps given by local government. “White contracts” are those without official stamps and only signed by both sides.

written civil law or commercial law, China could construct its property rights through customary contract practices.⁴

Scholars of commercial history focus on contracts as their models for commercial activities and business operations. These historians study business practices, such as leasing and subleasing, partnerships, share distribution, and debt management, as reflected in various contracts produced as a result of commercial activities. From these practices, complicated business models, such as vertical integration, were built by Chinese merchants to optimize industrial production and commercial distribution. These models, as well as the innovative spirit and entrepreneurship of Chinese merchants, suggest another path of development beyond the western influence.⁵

These three approaches from social, legal and commercial history, though all have their western counterparts, respectively cover three different aspects of contracts in late imperial China. Contracts regulate social relationships in a society. Contracts define the legal status of a property or even a person. Contracts also facilitate commercial activities in a market economy.

While most studies take a single aspect of contracts for their subject, this chapter attempts to explore a variety of documents and attach them to the historical developments of a specific region. The scope goes beyond the form of contracts, being expanded to different levels of texts produced during economic activities in villages. The investigation

⁴ See “Part 1. Contract and the Establishment of Property Rights,” in Madeleine Zelin et al. eds., *Contract and Property in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

⁵ The most successful work of this approach is Madeleine Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), which is based on the contracts and business documents from salt industries in Zigong. Also see the five articles in “Part 2: Contract and the Practice of Business,” *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*.

concentrates on a marginal society and its use of texts during two hundred years of economic transformation.

Compared to core areas that many scholars have studied, the economy in Pingnan was relatively isolated. However, after the reconstruction of the economic order during the mid-eighteenth century after the destructive dynastic transition, and the opening of Fuzhou as a treaty port in the early nineteenth century, Pingnan was eventually integrated into a greater regional and global market. This transformation of economic structure in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the diversification of written texts used in Pingnan villages. More written texts were used by different layers of society and in different economic realms from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

To fully illustrate the texts used in the economic realm, the following chapter consists of two main sections: one discussing documents dealing with lineage properties, the other discussing documents dealing with exchanges outside of lineage principles. The time period of these two sections overlap with one another, and both were subjected to the same economic transformation in northeastern Fujian from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

Economic Activities within Lineages

The Redistribution of Family Estates: “Dividing the House”

During the late imperial period, family and lineage organizations were not only the basic social unit in Pingnan, but also the basic economic unit. Many documents were drawn up to deal with economic activities within the boundaries of lineage organizations.

Generally, properties were not held by an individual but by a family, or held in common by a lineage organization. When the size of a family or a lineage grew, a general problem was how to properly distribute the properties to its multiplying members. Especially when the lineage organization extended to a certain degree, and the social and economic status of its numerous members diversified, the conflicts among these members also grew larger. The inevitable issue that a family had to face, unless they had fewer than two male offspring, was how to break down the family into several units and fairly divide the family estates among them. The process was so crucial that some scholars refer to it by the Chinese term, “*fenjia* 分家,” or “house-dividing.”⁶ After house-dividing, a family was divided into several units – usually depending on how many descendants the family head had – and each unit had its own property. Since the properties had been divided, they also generally became different residential units.

“House-dividing” was an important stage for the development of family and lineage organization. Through this procedure, a family was nominally and economically divided into two or more units, but the connection among them was still maintained. They usually held communal rituals together, and sometimes met jointly for public affairs. If the bond among these families was persistently maintained, after several generations this multifamily agglomeration would have to be further organized as a lineage organization, and an economic mechanism was required to facilitate cooperation among these

⁶ David Wakefield, *Fenjia: Household Division and Inheritance in Qing and Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998). “Fenjia” is sometimes translated as “household dividing” or “family dividing.” In my dissertation, “household” is reserved for the officially registered unit, and “family” as an abstract kinship unit. I use “house” to emphasize the economic/ materialistic aspect of this process.

multilayered familial units.⁷ However, before a complicated lineage organization was formed, the most essential questions that a family had to face at the initial division of family estates were how to properly redistribute these estates to each unit, and how to persistently maintain the bond among the new familial units.

Although the moral ideal of a large family living together for generations without being divided was still maintained and frequently mentioned in documents regarding house-dividing,⁸ the ideal large family was not the norm in late imperial Fujian. House-dividing differed from inheritance: a family could be divided before or after the death of the family leader, and there were many reasons for a family to be divided into several units. Although house-dividing was usually regarded as violating the Confucian doctrine of filial piety, a family would divide itself for various practical reasons. It was revealed that many families divided their registered household to avoid military or corvée obligations, since these government obligations were distributed on the basis of registered households. For example, one house-dividing document in Pingnan claims that a wealthy and large family was an easy target for demanding government and local powers, so that they had to be divided to avoid endless requests from officials.⁹

⁷ Taking the cases in Fujian, Zheng Zhenman depicts a “development circle” from families and lineages in Chinese society. See Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*, 31-70.

⁸ The story of Zhang Gongyi 張公藝 was frequently mentioned in documents of house-dividing. Zhang Gongyi is a legendary figure during the seventh century. He was openly praised by the Tang emperor, for his family which was not divided for nine generations. His name was widely mentioned in the documents in Pingnan and elsewhere. See also the case presented in Wakefield, *Fenjia*, 59.

⁹ Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*, 32-36; Zhangfang zhengjiu 長房正鬪, 2.

However, in most cases, families were divided for property-management purposes, and, moreover, for the integrity of an overall family entity. For example, one genealogy mentions that a family was divided twice, because the family leader was so good at managing his wealth that he accumulated enough properties to be divided to his sons after a first dividing.¹⁰ The family head divided family estates to his descendants twice in order to make sure that all of them would receive a fair portion of the estates that they would inherit while the family head was still alive, so that there would not be further disputes after the family head died. In some cases, it turned out that the dividing occurred several years after the death of the family head, and the signature on the documents belonged to the head's widow.¹¹ This kind of situation usually occurred when some or all of the descendants were too young to manage the properties when the family head died. If the family estates had been divided when the heirs were so young, the older family members might have encroached on the properties of the younger members and further conflicts might have developed.

In other words, “house-dividing” was essentially a procedure that redistributed family properties to the new family economic units, and its primary concern was to ensure a smooth transfer of properties without harming the integrity of the general family bond. Therefore, it was very important to make sure that the timing of dividing was right, the process of dividing was fair, and the result of dividing would stand the test of time. While the timing of dividing was decided by complicated negotiations among family or even

¹⁰ *Ruiyun Yao-shi zupu*, 43.

¹¹ *Renfang zhongyi wujiu* 仁房忠懿五圖.

lineage members, the purpose of introducing written house-dividing documents was to guarantee the latter two elements.

“House-Dividing” Documents

The terms for house-dividing documents vary from time to time and place to place. In Pingnan and many places in southeastern China, a document called *jiushu* 鬮書, literally “the book of allotment,” was drawn up when houses were divided. The name of this document came from the process of allotment during the distribution of the divided family properties. The format of this document also varies. In Pingnan, a formal *jiushu* usually had two parts. The first part was a preface explaining the reason for house-dividing and the method of distribution. It often emphasized that all the family properties, including fields, mountains, woods and buildings, had been divided into several lots, depending on the number of heirs, and that the participants had done their best to ensure that each lot would have the same quantity and quality of properties. Each heir acquired a part of the properties, according to the lot he drew. The process of lot-drawing was performed openly, with witnesses, and the end of the preface emphasized that each heir would accept this result without future remorse. The principle of impartiality was the most important quality presented in this first part of the document. The second part of the document consisted of the lists of properties for each heir according to the lot he had received. Each item of property was described in detail. If the item was a field, its boundaries, the amount it produced annually and the rent would be listed. If the item was a house, the numbers of

floors and rooms, and sometimes its style, would be described. Since these lists would serve as future evidence of ownership, precision was required to avoid disputes.¹²

The format of house-dividing documents varied. In northern China, the document, “*fenjia dan* 分家單,” was a single piece of paper in the form of a contract. In Pingnan, “the book of allotment” was made in the form of a booklet. Each recipient kept a copy of the booklet as his lot. The content of each booklet was identical, but only the cover identified the owner-recipient and the lot he received. For example, “the second lot of the first branch” on the cover meant that the first branch, i.e. the owner of this document, received the properties listed in the second lot of this book of allotment. After this document was signed, the family was formally divided into several “branches” (*fang* 房). As with other contracts, a *jiushu* was signed by all the participants, including the head of the family as “the host of allotment” (*zhujiu* 主鬮) and the representative of each branch. Sometimes the witnesses (*zaijian* 在見), the “distributors” (*junfeng/junchou* 均分/均抽) who averaged the properties, and the scribe (*bingbi* 秉筆) who wrote the documents also signed their names at the end of the documents. The witness and the distributors were usually affinal relatives, and the mother’s brothers were often invited to take the role of distributors.

In principle, all the family properties were equally divided among all the heirs, but several other conventional arrangements might be made with the agreement of all family members. For example, in an 1871 house-dividing document for a Zhang family of Jitou, a series of arrangements were recorded before the lists of properties in each lot. The eldest son and the eldest grandson of the first branch each could receive additional lands of four

¹² For the format of the document of house-dividing in other parts of China, see Uchida Tomoo 内田智雄, *Chūgoku nōson no bunke seido* 中国農村の分家制度 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1956)

dan in the name of “respecting the eldest brother.” For the other four branches, each could get additional money in the name of “marriage expenses,” according to how many sons they had, but if any of the sons did not marry, they had to return the money to the others. These arrangements were an attempt to balance things out among elder and younger offspring, and to make sure that everyone would be satisfied with the result.

Besides additional properties for the eldest heir and marriage expenses for unmarried descendants, a certain amount of land was often secured to support the parents after house-dividing. After both parents died, these fields would become sacrificial fields to provide the expenses for their worship rituals. In some cases, a certain amount of land might be directly secured as sacrificial fields before the parents both died. For example, in the 1871 document from Jitou mentioned above, it was clearly listed that several fields were kept undivided to support the mother during her lifetime, and several as sacrificial fields. These undivided fields were collectively owned by members of this family even after house-dividing, and, in principle, could not be sold or given to other families unless all the members of the original family agreed. These undivided properties appeared in almost all the house-dividing documents I found in Pingnan and indeed played an important role. In the name of supporting the parents during their lives and the rituals of ancestral worship afterward, these properties created an economic bond among family members even after the family was divided. While there were several ways to keep the divided family members together, such as genealogies or annual rituals of ancestral worship, these corporate properties provided an economic foundation for maintaining connections among family members. These economic connections for a family paved the

way to a stronger lineage organization after these families divided again in later generations.

Although house-dividing was an important stage for a family, the use of a formal house-dividing document might be limited to rich families with multiple properties. For these families, keeping a written document with the principle of impartiality was important to prevent from further disputes and the dissolution of lineage bonds. However, although many retrospective descriptions in genealogies mention the process of house-dividing and even the use of written documents in earlier centuries,¹³ in Pingnan, the earliest house-dividing document, found in the genealogy of the Guxia Chens, was signed in 1780. This document, signed eighteen years after the death of the family head, contains the widow's statements, transcribed by her son-in-law, and the complicated arrangement of properties, including the undivided sacrificial fields of previous generations, the fields reserved for supporting the expense of the ancestral shrine, the reserved fields for awarding families with degree-holders, and the fields divided to her four sons and their descendants. This family was apparently very rich: the list shows that the descendants of their fourth son gained ninety-five pieces of land registered as commoner's fields, fourteen as military fields, one new house, one cesspit and nearby establishments, one empty ground, one small hill with woods, and two barns in the ancestral shrine. According to the words of the widow, this family had begun accumulating properties in the generation of her parents-in-law, which was two generations before 1780 and followed roughly after the dynastic transition.

¹³ For example, the Genealogy of The Gantang Zhangs described the house-dividing among the eight sons of the progenitor in the tenth century. The description emphasized that all the properties were equally divided into eight, and the documents of these divided properties were preserved by the descendants of each son. *Gantang Zhang-shi zupu*, 41. However, whether this description reflected that fact of the period it describes (the tenth century), of the period when this description was claimed to be created (the fifteenth century) or of the period when this description was copied (the mid-nineteenth century) was highly questionable.

Their family properties continued to increase after her husband's death, and her two eldest sons, who got official degrees and built the ancestral shrine, contributed a great deal to the rise of their family.¹⁴ As an important paper proving the property arrangement in an earlier period and the contribution of their branches, this document was the only house-dividing document transcribed in the genealogy of the Guxia Chens.

This sophisticated document of the Chens, compiled by the widow's son-in-law, illustrates their familiarity with the whole process and the format of the house-dividing document. This familiarity indicates that the use of formal written evidence in redistributing family properties began before 1780 in this region, though it might be limited to families with rich economic resources and sufficient cultural ones. However, more house-dividing documents signed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were found in Pingnan. Some of them are as complicated as the Chens' document from 1780, but many of them are much simpler. The change of quality and quantity at this time implies a wider use of written documents during the process of house-dividing. More families realized the need for documentation and had the ability to make a formal document to announce the principle of impartiality and sustain the result of property redistribution among family members.

Accumulation and Management of Lineage Properties

The book of allotment was basically the contract for house-dividing, the most important phase in the development of a family. After the redistribution of family properties, a single family economically and nominally became multiple separated families,

¹⁴ *Guxia Chen-shi zupu*, 45-49.

but they were still connected with one another as several “branches” sharing the same paternal origin and the same corporate properties saved during the house-dividing. As these families were divided again in the next generation, further sub-branches were produced and each sub-branch saved and shared their own corporate properties again. In the ideal condition – each family having at least one male descendant, each had retained their own properties and there had been a smooth transfer to the next generation – several generations later, this hierarchical family-alliance would become very large, and the ownerships of corporate properties would become very complicated.

This ideal condition of an expanding family-alliance assumed that the natural resources were abundant, and the social and economic circumstances were stable. However, in the case of Pingnan, this ideal condition was the exception rather than the rule. According to the genealogies, because land was very limited in this mountainous county, male descendants frequently moved out of their original communities in search of new lands and new opportunities. These emigrants might or might not join in the house-dividing of their original families. In many cases, families could not retain their properties, and had to sell them to richer local people – according to the contracts, sometimes even corporate properties were sold. These families therefore became tenants and had no property but the contracted rights of tenants to pass land down to their descendants.

Only a few families could keep accumulating properties and transfer them to following generations. In order to manage the accumulated corporate properties, these families, or family-alliances, often had better records of properties as well as of descent lines. To clarify the ownership and rights for each property, they had to keep records of the

corporate properties saved in each generation – mostly in the name of sacrificial fields for the family leader before house-dividing. On the other hand, those who lost their properties and became tenants, as time went by, had relatively little information about either the transaction history of the properties that they might have partial ownership of or the history of their extended families and ancestors. Therefore, in the process of lineage building, it was usually the family that owned the most properties – and the most written records – who led the effort. Their family history was put in the center of the lineage and written in the genealogies, and other tenant-relatives, who might not have any documents, might or might not have their ancestors' names listed in the genealogies.¹⁵

The best example of a successful family with superior records in Pingnan is the lineage of Zhang Buqi's descendants in Jitou. Zhang Honglu (1855-1941), Zhang Buqi's great-great-great-grandson, left behind a detailed account of his fields, with the title "General Register of Tenanted Fields" (*zongdianbu* 總佃簿) on the cover. This detailed register records information about the sacrificial fields to his ancestors to which he shared the rights, the fields designated to support his parents, and the fields that he was granted after house-dividing. As a government student and the eldest of the five sons, he compiled this account in 1895, two years before his father's death. This register illustrates the total number of fields that Zhang Honglu had the right to manage. Sixty-three fields were directly under his control (the seventeenth generation). Thirty-one belonged to his parents

¹⁵ For example, in the genealogy of the Guxia Chens compiled in the nineteenth century, it transcribes one document of house-dividing in the eighteenth century, and most genealogical records focus on those whose ancestors participated in this house-dividing, even though this genealogy was made for all the Chens in Guxia. Apparently the descendants of this richest and most documented family led the lineage building of the Guxia Chens. In other words, the economic documents actually influenced how the lineage documents were compiled. Ibid.

(the sixteenth generation), but after his parents' deaths, he and his four brothers had to manage these fields together. Another seventy-three entries describe the sacrificial fields to his ancestors. (See Chart 6.) The ownerships of these fields were shared according to the house-dividing agreement in each generation. For example, Zhang Honglu's grandfather (the fifteenth generation) was the elder of the two sons who inherited the properties of his great-grandfather (the fourteenth generation). Therefore, the nine sacrificial fields to his great-grandfather were owned and managed by his descendants in two groups, who collected the rents and paid the taxes in turns. Zhang Honglu, as a member of the first group, had the right to participate in the management of these nine fields every other year. Zhang Honglu's great-grandfather was the third of his great-great-grandfather's five sons (the thirteenth generation). Therefore, he and other descendants of his great-grandfather had to collect the rent of the five sacrificial fields to his great-great-grandfather every five years.

Chart 6 Properties records in *General Register of Tenanted Fields*¹⁶

| Generation | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Entry | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 27 | 5 | 9 | 11 | 31 | 63 |
| Size | 16.00 | 16.00 | 26.00 | 33.00 | 36.00 | 147.16 | 48.00 | 69.50 | 64.60 | 147.00 | 270.85 |

¹⁶ From *Zongdianbu* 總佃簿. Most entries recorded here are grain fields, and a few produced sweet potatoes. The size of these fields was measured by the unit of *dou* 斗, which was a unit for volumes, not a unit for area. These fields were recorded by their prospective amount of yearly production, which decided the amount of rents that tenants should pay. A few entries do not have clear records of size, so the total size of some generation should be a little bit higher.

As time went by, if the sacrificial fields kept accumulating, the ownership of each generation's sacrificial fields would become very complicated. Zhang Honglu's register was made to clarify the ownership of his own fields and the fields he shared with other lineage members. The whole register is divided by generation. The name of the ancestor in each generation, the locations of his and his wife's graves, and the number of his sons were written as the headline of each section. Following the headline is the detailed record of the sacrificial fields that contributed to the ritual worship of this ancestor. The recorded information includes the location of each field, its size, and the name of its current tenant – the tenants could be lineage members but could also be people with different surnames. For the fields dedicated to the later generations that Zhang Honglu himself had to collect the rents for, the rent of each field was also noted. At the end of each section, the total amount of taxes on these fields, the household that these fields were registered to, and other duties were listed. For example, in the end of the section for the fourteenth generation, after listing nine sacrificial fields, a note says:

The [size of the] fields above add up to six *dan*, nine *dou* and five *sheng*. They are [registered as] seventeen *mu*, three *feng*, seven *li* and five *hao* of commoner's fields, with the annual grain tax one *liang*, six *qian*, six *feng* and six *li*, under the registered household name of Zhang Lütai 張履泰 in the twenty-sixth *du*. The members [of the branch] who take turns holding the annual ritual of ancestral worship have to collect the rents and pay the tax. In the third month of the twenty-eighth year of the Daoguang reign (1848), the first branch, Qinyi 欽伊, started taking the turn, and in the twenty-ninth year, the second branch, Qin'gao 欽高, took the turn of worship. Since then, one branch takes the duty one year, and the other branch takes the duty the next year.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Zongdianbu*, 6.

This concluding short note provides different levels of information. The actual size of the fields is presented by the *dan-dou-sheng* system. *Dan-dou-sheng* was originally the measure for the volume of grain produced by a field but evolved into the unit for the *size* of the field, which was measured by its grain output. The actual area of this unit varied by regions, but was extensively used by local people in dialogue and in written contracts. However, in official records, these fields were recorded by the universal *mu-feng-li* system. In official regulations, local officials, or later owners, had to measure the fields and report the results to the county government. These results became the basis of the grain tax. But in reality, the procedure of measuring was seldom executed. Mostly officials and local owners just followed the old registered records, and the areas of fields were only recorded in family documents.

In his register, Zhang Honglu presents the size of fields in two ways. The local *dan-dou-sheng* system was used for each entry and for the total area that the family was managing. The total area of fields for each generation in county registration records was presented in the official system of *mu-feng-li*, as the basis of the grain tax, and the grain tax that the rotating rent collectors had to pay to the county government according to the registered number was presented in the monetary unit of *liang-qian-fen*. This difference also appears in the section on rents and taxes. The amount of rent for each field was recorded in units of grain volume following each entry. These were the actual amounts that the rent collectors had to collect from their tenants each year. The amount of tax was recorded in monetary units, since the payment of grain tax had been monetized during the latter half of the Ming dynasty. The tax amount only appeared at the end of each section,

since the rent collectors only needed to know the total amount they had to pay to the government for their registered fields.

Moreover, in order to clarify responsibility to the government, although these nine fields were actually in nine different locations and cultivated by several different tenants, the descendants had already integrated these fields and transferred the records into one single registered household name (Zhang Lütai), in practice the tax account of the sacrificial fields to this ancestor. Lastly, because these fields were shared by Zhang Qinyi's and Qin'gao's descendants, the note also sets out the order in which the respective branches should take the responsibility of collecting the rents and paying taxes, so that the duties of the branches are also clarified. These records in this short note show that the register played a role in clarifying both the duties to the government and the duties among shared owners. Instead of merely being a register of fields, it also lays down the instructions for managing these corporate properties.

Making Written Records for Family Properties

The information in this complicated register, which contains records regarding one hundred and sixty-seven fields and their ownerships, duties, and instructions for management, certainly drew on a large number of previous written records, including several generations' worth of property records and corporate property management. Zhang Honglu was thereby able to compile a comprehensive register with precise records from past generations.

However, when the Zhang family started to keep such sophisticated written records of properties is not clear. The records in the register start with the sacrificial fields to Zhang

Honglu's ancestor of the seventh generation, counting from their founding ancestor allegedly settling in Upper Zitou from another village in Pingnan during the Shunde reign (1426-1435).¹⁸ According to the lineage history they built up in the nineteenth century, their ancestor in the eighth generation, during the late sixteenth century, held the secret knowledge of geomancy and knew how to "catch the ghost." His perfectly-situated grave blessed the prosperity of his descendants in Jitou.¹⁹ This kind of rhetoric regarding ancestral graves in lineage stories often marked the significant moment of settlement rights,²⁰ so it would not be surprising if the family started to keep better genealogical information after the eighth generation or if the earliest record of sacrificial fields refers to the father in the seventh generation.

As for the earlier records, the graves of the ancestors in the first six generations were actually "rebuilt" together in 1914, and only after this renovation did these graves of earlier ancestors start to have inscribed tombstones.²¹ This activity of reconstruction, led by Zhang Honglu, implies that the ancestral graves in the first six generations were very simple, were heavily decayed, or possibly even hardly existed before the early twentieth century. Ancestral graves were not only an important focus for the ritual of communal ancestral worship, but also the earliest corporate properties a descendant group could commonly claim. Lack of this early information suggests that the Xitou Zhangs in Jitou,

¹⁸ *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 88.

¹⁹ *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 91.

²⁰ In the lineage history of another Zhangs (the Bajia Zhangs) in Jitou, it is during almost the same period (approximately the former half of the seventeenth century) that their early ancestor knew the geomancy and improved the *fengshui* of their settlement in Jitou. *Jitou Zhang-shi zupu Bajia zhipu* 滌頭張氏族譜八家支譜, 42.

²¹ *Xitou Zhang-shi zupu*, 88-90.

who later appeared to be a lineage group, were not well organized before the late fifteenth century, and did not have well-kept written records of their common properties. The common ritual of ancestral worship was formed in their eighth generation and the common properties started to be secured. This period, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is also the time when many local families in the Pingnan-Gutian area started to further organize themselves by setting up communal rituals or even compiling written genealogies, such as the Ruiyun Yaos in the previous chapter.

According to the Zhang genealogy, in 1670 the tenth-generation ancestor moved from Upper Jitou to the current location of Jitou, where the Bajia Zhangs claimed to have been settled since 1610.²² Two generations later, their ancestor in the twelfth generation, Zhang Buqi, became a local power during the reconstruction after the dynastic transition and the establishment of Pingnan County. It is also in Zhang Buqi's generation that we see a sudden increase of sacrificial fields to him. In the register, there were twenty-seven entries regarding sacrificial fields being assigned to Zhang Buqi, the ancestor of the twelfth generation (Chart 5). Zhang Buqi had more sacrificial fields registered to him than did any ancestors in any generation. In another register compiled by Zhang Honglu in 1895, *General Register of Contracts* (*qibai zongbu* 契白總簿), he recorded all the contracts for his properties and the properties he shared with other lineage members. The earliest purchase recorded in this register was made in 1725, by Zhang Buqi's father, Zhang Zhaorui 張兆瑞 (1674-1747),²³ and many records of land purchases were made during

²² The division between the Bajia Zhangs and the Xitou Zhangs is discussed in Chapter 4, and the rise of Zhang Buqi of Xitou Zhangs is discussed in Chapter 5.

²³ *Qibai zongbu*, 76.

Zhang Zhaorui's and Zhang Buqi's lifetimes. These records indicate that the properties of Zhang Buqi's family increased greatly during the early eighteenth century, or at least that written records of land acquisition started to appear more frequently during this period.

Zhang Honglu's ancestors kept records of their land transactions for a long period of time. They recorded these transactions consistently for 170 years, from 1725 to 1895, and in Zhang Honglu's generation, he had enough experience and knowledge to compile an overall register for all the fields and contracts in order to manage these lineage properties shared by numerous members.

Written Agreements and the Establishment of Lineage Trusts

However, it was not enough for families to manage such convoluted relationships of property ownership merely by keeping their own records. When the descendants grew numerous after several generations, if they still kept close relationships with one another, the number of members who shared the sacrificial fields to the same ancestor would be very large, and the management of the fields would be very complex. First, it was difficult to draw the boundaries of ownership. This was one of the reasons for keeping a written genealogical record. Second, it was difficult to impartially share the obligations and benefits among descendants who had rights to these corporate properties. Usually, these descendants were divided into several branches according to the birth order of the ancestor's sons, but after a period of time, the development of each branch might be uneven. Some might become particularly strong and some might be weak or even disappear. How to guarantee that all the branches always shared equal rights to each field would become a problem. Third, since each branch took turns managing the corporate properties every year, depending on how many sons the ancestor had, each branch would only take the

responsibility at intervals of several years. Especially when the fields were numerous, it became an important issue to make sure that all records were transmitted to the next branch, so that no one would take the chance to embezzle from the common properties when it was his turn.

Zhang Buqi's descendants started to face these problems a hundred years after his death. Zhang Buqi acquired a large amount of property during his lifetime as he rose to be a local leader, and he also secured a large number of undivided properties to be his sacrificial fields. Because of the foundation he built, his descendants generally prospered, and in the 1870s, his descendants had grown into more than one hundred families. How could more than one hundred families share twenty-seven fields, collecting the rents from different tenants and paying taxes every year? In 1876, nine representatives, including Zhang Honglu's uncle, from three branches – descendants of Zhang Buqi's three sons – gathered together to discuss this question. They made an agreement and decided to establish a trust for these common properties.²⁴

In the agreement, this trust was called “The Granary of Venerable Zhang Buqi Lühou” (*Buqi Zhanggong hao Lühou jigucang* 步齊張公號履侯積穀倉), referring to the physical space for storing the rents (in the form of grain) collected from his sacrificial fields, but it also included a fund and a committee of supervisors. A hundred years after Zhang Buqi's death, the rotating system had been forsaken and each branch of his descendants separately managed a portion of his sacrificial fields. These representatives decided to restore the system of different branches taking turns hosting the annual sacrificial ritual and collecting

²⁴ The copies of this agreement were included in the account books. See *Lühou Zhanggong jigucang xianwen yuan-chu-ru-cun qingce* 履侯張公積穀倉錢文原出入存清冊, and *Lühou Zhanggong jigucang zugu yuan-chu-ru-cun qingce* 履侯張公積穀倉租穀原出入存清冊.

all the annual rents, but in this restored system, all the rents collected were put into a public barn. Moreover, any deposit or withdrawal from the barn had to be supervised by a committee of nine representatives from the three branches of Zhang Buqi's descendants. It was also agreed that none of the corporate properties could be rented to their own lineage members, in order to prevent conflicts of interest. Only those who were *not* Zhang Buqi's descendants could farm these fields. This agreement formally established a committee to supervise these fields and made these incomes into a lineage trust.

However, after the first agreement in 1876, some members who took their turn did not submit the rents they collected each time and tried to encroach on the trust, so that the nine representatives and three branch leaders held another meeting in 1893. In this second agreement, they decided to expand the committee to twelve members (Zhang Honglu, who compiled the family registers above, was one of them), and asked for strict records deposits and withdrawals (Figure 21). Two kinds of account books were created: one for the records of grain that went in and out of the barn, the other for the money of the fund. The account books used the traditional format of so-called “four columns” (*sizhu* 四柱) and balanced the accounts every year.²⁵ According to the surviving account books, Zhang Buqi's descendants kept updating the records until at least the late 1920s. The agreement made in 1893 was copied in the first page of the account book and transmitted to subsequent generations. These two deals in such a short period illustrate the difficulty of keeping up the operation of lineage properties. Even though these operations were approved by leaders in each branch, members still violated the rules for their own profit. What the organization

²⁵ The four columns are: original amount (*yuan* 原), withdrawal amount (*chu* 出), deposit amount (*ru* 入) and balance amount (*cun* 存). The titles of the account books were actually *yuan-chu-ru-cun qingce* (原出入存清冊).

leaders could do was to better document family economic activities in order to better supervise the operation of the common barn and lineage fund.

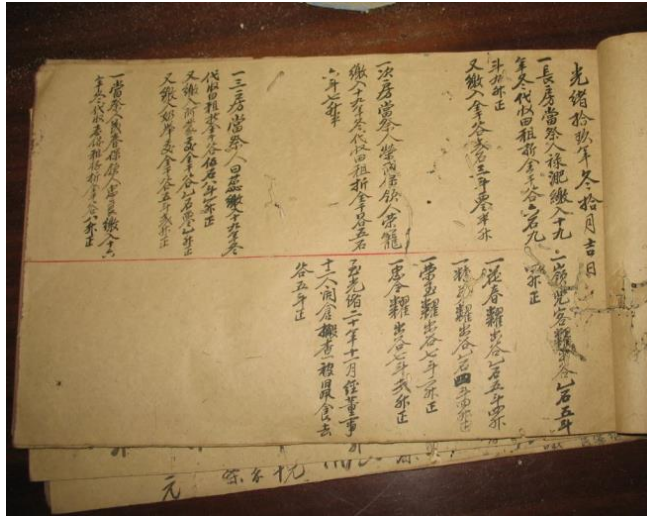


Figure 21 The Account Book for the Granary of Venerable Zhang Buqi Lühou (1893)

From these two series of account books, we can see that the descendants of Zhang Buqi managed this trust flexibly. The 1893 agreement states that, on the one hand, the common barn had to keep a certain amount of grain, and this grain could be used as relief for lineage members in years of flood or drought. On the other hand, the committee could also sell the grain when the price was high, and buy when the price was low. The agreement emphasized that “all those beneficial to our lineage members are the favors that our ancestors left to us,”²⁶ and legitimated the benefits they earned from their ancestor’s properties. The money for the fund was generally recorded in “foreign silver dollars” (*fanyin* 番銀), but in the records of deposit and withdrawal, different currencies, including copper coins and taels, were also used. Withdrawals from the fund were mainly used for annual rituals of ancestral worship, but sometimes were also used in other lineage affairs.

²⁶ Lühou Zhanggong jigucang zugu yuan-chu-ru-cun qingce, 1.

Meanwhile, the fund was also to be used for loans to villagers, and because of interest, its amount increased. Although there was no hint of the descendants of Zhang Buqi using the funds from this trust to invest in business or industries, the records show their trust was managed in a conservative but flexible way.

From personal involvement in lineage properties to the general management of collective properties among lineage members, keeping written records and written agreements were an important way to maintain the integrity of property rights, as well as the integrity of lineage organizations. These records became indispensable when the lineage organization grew and the ownership of corporate properties became complicated. Moreover, written documents were also used to assure the impartiality of property redistribution among family and lineage members, and every member shared the same responsibilities and benefits. These written documents within the lineage economy increased after the reestablishment of political and social order in the mid-eighteenth century.

While local families tried to reorganize themselves into the form of lineages, they also had to deal with the corporate properties within the lineage organization, an important economic bond among lineage members. When the major lineage expanded and acquired more properties, more agreements had to be created to sustain the integrity of the lineage. Several documents associated with Zhang Honglu, *General Register of Tenanted Fields* (created in 1895), *General Register of Contracts* (created in 1895), the second agreements and the two account books for the lineage trust based upon Zhang Buqi's sacrificial fields (both created in 1893, with Zhang Honglu in the committee), imply Zhang Honglu's role in reorganizing the family and lineage properties and the importance of textual management.

In the late nineteenth century, when Zhang Honglu initiated a series of activities to rearrange the lineage organization of the Xitou Zhangs, including compiling their first genealogy²⁷ and later rebuilding the graves of their earliest ancestors, he also felt the urge to textually rearrange their growing properties. His literary ability and his experience with property management are clearly shown in the different registers and documents he created. These records became the basis for his contemporaries to manage their properties, and were also consulted by his later descendants to differentiate their property rights.

Economic Activities in the Market

Between Lineages and Market

Properties were certainly not only transferred among family members. Many property exchanges, particularly land transactions, occurred outside of families or even of lineages. From the standpoint of families, the property, if not sold, might be redistributed to another family member in a later generation or eventually became corporate lineage property. Therefore, property transactions influenced not only the current individual owner, but also the collective ownership of the family or the lineage organization. While the family was taken as the basic economic unit, these concerns about property management were shown in highly-formulated land contracts, which regulated land transactions in two aspects.

²⁷ Zhang Honglu's effort to compile a comprehensive genealogy for the Xitou Zhangs is discussed in the Chapter 4.

First, the principle of “lineage priority” was shown in the convention that a deed included a declaration that the owner had asked all the lineage members whether they wanted the land, and found no one willing to take it; only after this could the owner sell the land to people outside the lineage. Although in practice the owner did not always ask “all the lineage members,” this formulated expression had become a conventional component of the land contract that dealt with transactions between parties from different descendant groups. At the end of the contract was another formulaic statement, a declaration that this transaction was willingly entered into by the owner, so that his lineage members would not question this transaction in the future. Both these expressions show the concern of lineage in land transactions, even though the land had been legally transferred to a family member through house-dividing.

Because of the principle of lineage priority, many property transactions in Pingnan were done between lineage members. For example, the Chen Ziming 陳子命 family of Longtan village preserved 141 contracts signed between 1723 and 1905. Among these contracts, about two-thirds of them (ninety-five contracts) were signed between the Chen Ziming family and people with the same surname in the same village. Their relationships, such as cousins, uncles, or nephews, were usually mentioned in the contracts. In the remaining one-third, although the contracts were signed by people of different surnames and living in different villages, many of these people had affinal relationships with the Chen family. In other words, when the lineage members of the Longtan Chens needed to trade their land for money, many traded it with other lineage members in the same village, or sought the buyers through lineage connections.

Second, at the beginning of the land contract, the source of the land being transferred would be also stated. The contract would clearly state whether this land was a “field acquired from house-dividing via allotment” (*yijiufeng tian* 已鬮分田), a “field inherited from the father” (*jicheng futian* 繼承父田), a “sacrificial field” (*jitian* 祭田) or a “commoner’s field purchased by oneself” (*jishou zhimai mintian* 己手置買民田). These statements made sure that the owner acquired this land via a formal procedure, either legally inheriting within the lineage group, or purchasing from the other party, so that the obligations to the state and to the lineage could be clarified in the new transaction. Moreover, the source of this land influenced the current transaction and ensuing relationships of the parties. For example, if the land was a “sacrificial field” commonly held by the lineage group, the contract would often include the statement that all the lineage members had agreed to the transaction. If the land had been legally transferred via house-dividing, only the sons of the original owner could claim the right to ask for “additional payment” after the transaction had been made, unless another contract, called “complete sale,” was signed. For example, in a contract signed in 1836, it was the grandson of the original owner who asked for the additional payment from the buyer’s grandson. Although their grandfathers had both passed away, the right to ask for the additional payment and the obligation to pay it were inherited by both heirs.²⁸

Both components contain the concept that family or lineage members might have rights to the property, and property transactions did not only transfer individual ownership, but also had to deal with the potential rights of the lineage group. These particular concepts

²⁸ Contract No.80077.

about property rights and economic exchanges were reified in these formulated contracts produced during the transactions. Through making these written contracts, the owner traded the rights of this property out of his own family or lineage, and transferred them to the exchange market.

Proliferation of Written Contracts

Because contracts were mostly compiled after an exemplar, these conventional expressions, such as selling after asking all the lineage members, were simply copied from the previous models. However, using formulaic languages does not mean that the concepts within these contracts were simply literal and not followed by the traders. On the contrary, the use of formulated written contracts to some extent helped to shape a common ground among traders. This common ground became more important as the circle of exchange expanded and the patterns of exchange became more complicated. A villager might have to trade with someone outside of his own community, and the two sides might have different perceptions of property and ownership. In these circumstances, a formulated contract helped them to reach an agreement, and at the same time, the patterns of exchange, as well as concepts about properties, were accepted along with the use of the contract. In the historical perspective, knowing when and how a region started to use written contracts in economic exchanges can lead us to speculate when and how the local people adopted certain patterns of exchange and economic concepts.

Scholars trace the use of written contracts in China to the Warring States Period (475 BC to 221 BC),²⁹ and archaeological findings in Dunhuang and western frontiers suggest a long continuity of the forms of written contracts. Many elements, such as the signature of the guarantor, and terminologies, had been standardized during the Middle Period.³⁰ From the middle to the early modern period, state power and printing were two important means for diffusing formulated contracts. To manage the records of people's properties and collect taxes, the Song government attempted several times to issue the official forms of contract as the only legal ones, and require people to register the contracts with local governments. Although these attempts at official intervention did not last long, they did help to standardize the forms of contracts.³¹ Commercial publications also promoted the standardization. Printed household encyclopedias and handbooks appeared in the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties and flourished during the latter half of the Ming dynasty. These manuals collected various forms of contracts used on different occasions, so that the traders could simply fill in their information into an exemplar. While these early contracts were in practice rare, these exemplars became an important source for historians studying different categories of contract during the early modern period.³²

²⁹ For example, the earliest item in an authoritative collection of Chinese contract is an inscription over a bronze vessel in 919 B.C. See Chang Chuanxi 張傳璽 et al. eds., *Zhongguo lidai qiyue huibian kaoshi* 中國歷代契約會編考釋 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1995), 3.

³⁰ Dai Jianguo 戴建國, *Tang-Song biange shiqi de falü yu shehui* 唐宋變革時期的法律與社會 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2010).

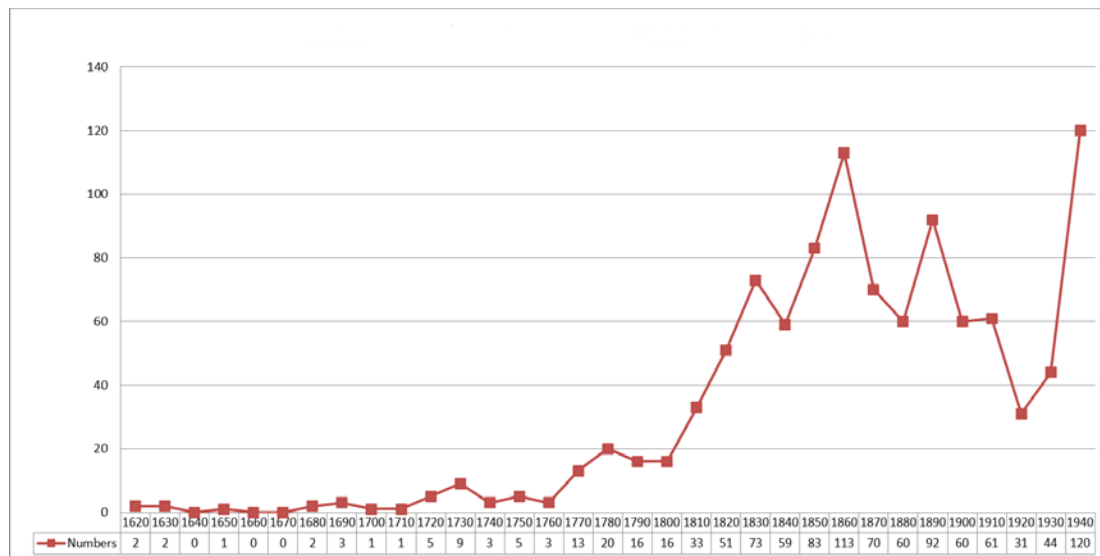
³¹ Valerie Hansen, *Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China: How Ordinary People Used Contract, 600-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

³² Niida Noboru was among the first scholars to use materials for his study of Chinese legal history. See Niida Noboru, *Chūgoku hōseishi kenkyū* 中國法制史研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1959-1964), also Yang Guozhen, *Ming-Qing tudi qiyue wenshu yanjiu*, 12-26.

The standardized contracts had been circulated in China for a long time, but this does not mean that every corner of China used the same format during these centuries, or, in a further step, that all the corners of China started using written contracts at the time. Many marginal regions only started to use written contracts after being politically or economically integrated into the Chinese empire. Studying how these marginal regions accepted the written forms helps us to understand how people there accepted a certain pattern of economic exchange and how this change influenced their material and social life. Studies on the timber trade in the Qingshui River Valleys in multicultural Guizhou, and those on Taiwanese aborigines' land rights after contact with Dutch colonizers and Chinese immigrants, are both based on the written contracts collected locally, and reveal the role of written contracts during the encounters of different economic modes and the ensuing consequences.³³

³³ For Qingshui River Valleys, see Zhang Yingqiang 張應強, *Mucai zhi liudong: Qingdai Qingshujiang xiayou diqu de shichang, quanli yu shehui* 木材之流動: 清代清水江下游地區的市場、權力與社會 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2006), especially the fifth chapter “Cunluo shehui shenghuo yu diquan guannian 村落社會生活與地權觀念.” For aboriginal land rights in frontier Taiwan, see Chen Chiu-kun, *Qingdai Taiwan tuzhu diquan* 清代台灣土著地權 (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2009).

Chart 7 Number of Pingnan contracts by decades



Unlike the valley people in Guizhou and the aborigines in Taiwan, people in Pingnan, the northern part of Gutian County before the 1730s, had been under the administration of the Chinese empire since the eighth century AD, and certainly had used contracts brought by the lowlanders and incessant immigrants. When and how written contracts prevailed in this mountainous area is obscure. In my collection of 1,052 contracts in Pingnan (see Chart 7), the earliest one was signed in 1622, close to the end of the Ming dynasty. There were contracts in each decade beginning in the 1680s, with a slight increase in the 1730s when the county was established. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the collected contracts increased, and the first peak was in the mid-nineteenth century: 113 contracts are found in the 1860s. Since the 1820s, more than fifty contracts are found in each decade, except for the 1920s and 1930s, when Pingnan was in chaos because of bandits during the early Republican regime.

The lack of written contracts before the 1620s does not mean that people in Pingnan did not use written contracts before that time. Economic development, including the use of written documents, is not always a linear progression. Early contracts could have been lost during the chaos of the Ming-Qing transition, and during this period, properties might have been transferred through violence instead of through trading. However, it is certain that the earliest written evidence of their properties that Pingnan people could find was mostly signed in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In most cases, all the contracts related to the same properties, so-called *shangshou qi* 上手契, would be preserved together, so that the earliest records of transaction could be easily found. The longest combination I found in Pingnan is a collection of thirteen contracts attached together into a long roll. All are related to a single piece of land, and attached in the chronological order of the signing of the contracts. Even though people used these means of preserving the early contracts, the earliest one that I could find was no earlier than the early seventeenth century, and most of them were signed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when order in Pingnan was restored. Even though people might forge earlier contracts to support their current ownership, these dates indicate the earliest period of contractual order that people could remember. When political and social order was reconstructed, villagers also tried to rebuild economic order by reclaiming their property ownership.

The apparently rising number of contracts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be explained in two different but related ways. First, written contracts started to be generally accepted as the standard form of economic transaction, so that contracts were made for each transaction. Second, the economy in Pingnan was thriving during the nineteenth century, so that there were more economic transactions as

well as more surviving written contracts. While the first explanation mainly asks how written texts earned their credibility, became a routine part of transactions, and therefore changed the mode of trade, the second explanation focuses on the general transformation of economic structure in Pingnan, especially the commercialization and development of the land market. However, these two explanations could be the result of the same transformation: more transactions from a changing economic structure required more regulation from written texts.

Diversification of Land Rights, Land Transactions and Land Contracts

Many different kinds of economic exchange were regulated by these contracts, and most of them were related to land transactions. Land was always the most important form of property in Pingnan. In house-dividing documents from Pingnan, most properties transferred to sons were land. However, the increasing number of land contracts suggests that, from the late eighteenth century, many more people sold their land for money. In the land contracts, a set phrase given as the reason for selling land was “lack of silver to use now” (*jin que yin shiyong* 今缺銀使用). This expression was usually used at the beginning of the contract, to explain why the original owner decided to either sell his land or mortgage it. It might have become a set phrase in contracts during the late Ming period, when the policy of single-whip tax collection translated all kinds of taxes and corvée service into money, which greatly raised the demands for silver in daily transactions.³⁴ Of course, the vast inflow of silver from Japan and the New World since the late Ming could

³⁴ Liang Fangzhong, *The Single-Whip Method of Taxation in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

also have changed the way that people dealt with economic exchanges.³⁵ In some contracts, the reason for requiring silver would be stated – to pay taxes, to bury a deceased parent, or to prepare for a son’s wedding – but most contracts just used this set phrase without any explanation. Although this set phrase did not necessarily reflect the exact form of transaction, the frequent appearance of contracts with this conventional expression indicates that many minor landowners in Pingnan needed to transform their land into currency.

Landowners had several different ways to make money from their lands, which reflected on the various kinds of land contract. Scholars have pointed out several complicated modes of land transactions in southeastern China. Landowners could sell the land outright (*duan* 斷) or redeemably (*mai* 賣), mortgage the land (*dian* 典), ask for additional payment after the land had been sold or mortgaged (*zhaotie* 找貼 or *jin* 盡), sell the rights to ask for additional payment to others, or borrow money on the basis of previous land transactions. In Pingnan, the purpose of the contract was written in the upper left corner of the paper in a flowery form with an auspicious expression, such as *li maiqi daji* 立賣契大吉 (the great auspiciousness to this contract of redeemable sale) (Figure 22).

³⁵ There have been many researches on the silver influx in China during the late imperial period. A persuasive article published recently claims that most of these foreign silvers during the late Ming went into the government system via tax collection and tribute trades and did not, as some historians assume, substantially change the market order. The authors insist that the integration of silvers into Chinese economy was a long and complicated process, and, since the national market had not yet been formulated in the eighteenth century, the development in each region were quite different. For example, in southwestern China, silver was brought into the river valleys there by the wood business operated by the government. Local Miao people made these silver taels into decorative accessories to display their power and wealth, but did not put them into the local market. See Chen Chunsheng 陳春聲 and Liu Zhiwei, “Gongfu, shichang yu wuzhi shenghuo: shilun shiba shiji meizhou baiyin shuru yu zhongguo shehui bianqian zhi guanxi 貢賦、市場與物質生活：試論十八世紀美洲白銀輸入與中國社會變遷之關係,” *Qinghua daxue xuebao* (zhexue shehui kexue ban) 25.5(2010): 65-81.

These characters were written to clarify the purpose of contracts, but probably also to ask for blessings upon the transactions.

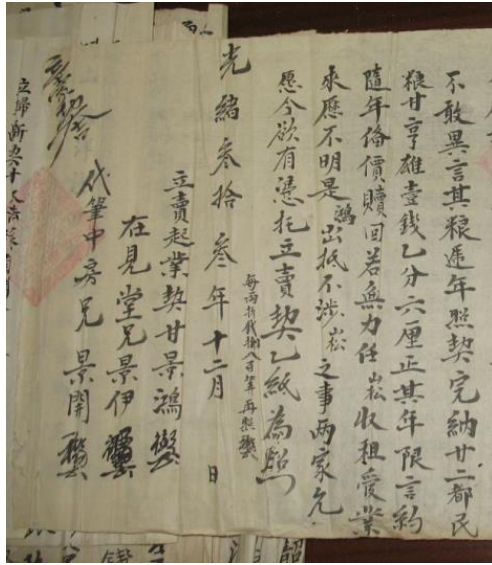


Figure 22“The Great Auspiciousness to This Contract of Redeemable Sale” (top-left corner, 1907)

These different forms of transaction with their specific contracts could, by mutual agreement, be used for the same piece of land. For example, Liu Zichao’s 劉子朝 father in Liyang 梨洋 village sold a piece of land to Wei Naiqiu’s 韋奶球 grandfather in Zhongyang 忠洋 village. After asking for the additional payment from this transaction, Liu Zichao eventually redeemed the land from Wei Naiqiu. However, in 1782, he again sold this land, this time to Chen Zhengji 陳振計 in Longtan village for twenty *liang* and made an agreement that he could redeem his land after five years. The two parties also clarified that the Wei family, whose relative was also the middleman in this transaction, would have nothing related to this land after the Chens redeemed it, and that this land would be transferred from the Liu family’s registered household account to the Chen family’s in the next revision of official land registration. In 1786, within the time limit of

redemption, Liu Zichao, “lacking silver to use now,” asked for the additional payment of one *liang* two *qian* and five *fen* from Chen Zhengji and seven more years to redeem the land. Liu Zichao asked for the payment again (six *liang* seven *qian* and five *fen* this time), and another redemption extension of five years. There was no record whether Liu Zichao redeemed this land by the time or not, but he might not have regained it again between 1796 and 1811, because fifteen years later, Liu Naizong 劉奶宗, Liu Zichao’s son, asked for the additional payment of 4,800 *wen* for the same land from Chen Zhengdiao 陳振調, Chen Zhengji’s younger brother, who inherited the land rights from his brother and now managed their family property. Liu Naizong asked for the additional payments twice more, in 1817 and 1820, and respectively got three thousand *wen* and five *liang*. In 1826, Liu Naizong and his younger brother eventually decided to sell this land outright. The Chen family paid five *liang* to completely own this land, and the Liu family agreed that they would not ask for more additional payments in the future, would not redeem the land, and would not claim any reason, such as preparing for a wedding or a burial ceremony, to ask for money and cause troubles. This time, the contract was made with Chen Yixian 陳奕賢, the son of Chen Zhengdiao, who might have gained this land through house-dividing.³⁶ From 1782 to 1826, the Liu family asked for at least five additional payments, and seven contracts, including the initial contract of redeemable sale and the final contract of outright sale, were made between these two families in two generations. The long negotiation over this piece of land between them was recorded in these contracts.

³⁶ Contracts No. 80015-80021. For the relationships of these names in the contracts, see *Longtancun Chen-shi zupu* 龍潭村陳氏族譜, 32 and 37.

On the one hand, the diversification of transaction modes and the space for negotiations enabled landowners convert their lands into more money; on the other hand, these complicated transactions made written documents indispensable during the process of repeated negotiations. In the contract, the parties had to follow a consensual model and clearly state their rights to the land in question. These written records were the basis for further negotiations, whether they could ask for the further payment, or whether they could redeem the land after a certain period of time; thus the records had to be carefully kept. The rising number of contracts during this period resulted from the frequent exchanges of land for money and vice versa.

Managing Contracts

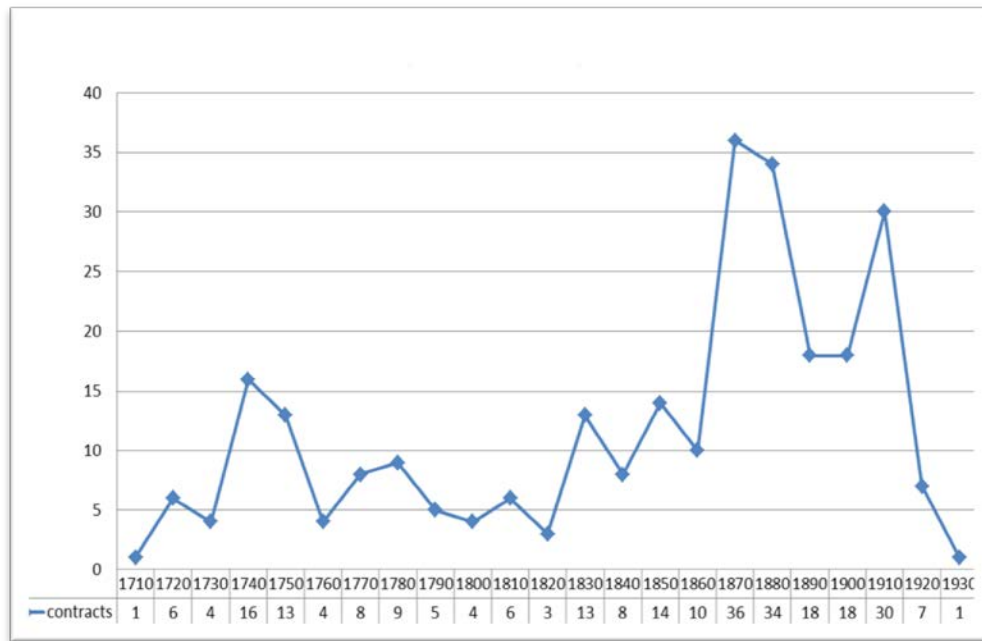
These frequent land transactions concentrated land into the hands of a few rich families in many villages. These families not only owned the lands around their villages, but acquired distant lands through trading with people in other villages. As in the above case of the Chens and the Lius, the land originally belonged to a villager in Liyang and was first sold to a villager in Zhongyang, then to a villager in Longtan. For families who accumulated numerous local and more distant estates through transactions, proper management of these estates necessitated keeping written records and carefully arranging the contracts for each transaction. As previously mentioned, in 1895, Zhang Honglu compiled a *General Register of Contracts* recording all the contracts related to the properties he owned and shared. This register lists 147 entries. Each entry includes one or more pieces of land, which were transacted together, and all the transactions regarding them. Behind each transaction were the contracts made when the transactions happened, and altogether there were at least 270 transactions, i.e. 270 contracts, recorded by entries in

this register. The earliest one is a contract of redeemable sale over six pieces of land made by Zhang Buqi's father in 1714.³⁷ These six pieces of land later became part of the sacrificial fields to Zhang Buqi and were shared by his descendants, including Zhang Honglu, so that its record appeared in Zhang Honglu's register. The last one is a contract of an outright sale, added by Zhang Honglu in 1931, ten years before his death.³⁸ The numbers of contracts recorded in each decade (Chart 8) briefly summarize the land transactions conducted by Zhang Honglu and his ancestors. The rise of the numbers in the 1740s and 1750s marked the escalation of the Zhang family's economic status during the period of Zhang Buqi around the time that Pingnan County was established. The second peak, in the late nineteenth century, was the result of further marketization of lands in the Pingnan region. Many contracts made during this period were contracts for mortgages or for additional payments. However, these figures cannot represent all the contracts signed by Zhang Honglu's ancestors. Many properties purchased by his ancestors might have been given to another branch during house-dividing. Since Zhang Honglu did not have any rights to them, the records of transactions concerning them would not appear in his register. The actual number of contracts made by him and his ancestors should far outnumber this simple account.

³⁷ *Qibai zongbu*, 123.

³⁸ *Qibai zongbu*, 114.

Chart 8 Number of contracts from Zhang Honglu's *General Register*



The Zhang family of Jitou was not the only family who needed to make a written register of their contracts. In 1883, Gan Qianchu 甘乾初 of Jixia compiled a booklet with the title “The Journal of Estate Transactions” (*cangye liushui gangmu* 產業流水綱目), to record the estates managed by his family.³⁹ He did not own or share in as many properties as Zhang Honglu. Six records of estates, all brought into the Gan family between 1768 and 1900, were listed as sacrificial fields to Gan Qianchu’s father, and twenty-eight estates, brought into their family from 1805 to 1914, were listed as family estates. However, Gan compiled each entry carefully with many details. In each item, he summarized the contracts related to this item. For example, a typical record of one entry is as follows:

³⁹ Another very comprehensive account was *General Register of Contracts* (*qibai zongbu* 契白總簿) created by the grandson of Zhang Qinyi in 1895. This account also listed the estates of their family and the summaries of contracts related to each item.

In the twelfth month of the tenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1805), the great-grandfather bought two pieces of common fields from Gan Zhengzan. The local names [of the locations] are Linmeili Cuntou and Kuzhuwanwei Xiaqianzai. The total area is eight feng. (Its grain tax was registered in the household of Gan Erji and now belongs to our household.) The price we paid was two liang (every liang was counted as 810 wen). Executor of the contract: Gan Zhengzan; Witness: [Gan] Zhenjia; Middleman: Li Yuanyu; Scribe: Chen Nianchou.

In the tenth month of the twentieth year of the Daoguang reign (1845), Gan Qingbiao⁴⁰ asked for the additional payment of 4,200 wen [from this estate]. Executor of the contract of additional payment: (cousin) Gan Qingbiao and his brothers Xingshen and Xingding; Witness: cousin [Gan] Nianru; Middleman and scribe: [Gan] Yonghu.

In the twelfth month of the twenty-sixth year of the Guangxu reign (1900), Gan Nianrui asked for the additional payment of two liang and five qian, and then sold it outright.⁴¹ (The trees inside the boundaries noted in the contracts were also managed by us in perpetuity, and the grain tax was transferred to our household).⁴² Executor of this contract of additional payment and outright sale: Gan Nianrui; Witness: cousin [Gan] Shiqi; middleman and scribe: [Gan] Haoyi.

In the fourth year of the Republic (1915), the tax amount of these estates was reinvestigated, together with the estates in Faqianglong, Shangpinglong and Hongdan'gang. Serial number: 2508.⁴³

The first three records in this entry are apparently the summaries of three sequential contracts of redeemable sale, additional payment and outright sale. The recorder listed all the important details, such as the prices, payments and the names of participants (executors, witnesses, middlemen and scribes), and cut off the conventional expressions in contracts.

⁴⁰ He was the cousin, and probably adopted son, of Gan Zhengzan and inherited Gan Zhengzan's properties, including the ones that had been sold.

⁴¹ How many times that previous owner could ask for additional payment of the estate that had been sold was always a problem. But in the records that I found in Pingnan, mostly previous owners asked for one additional payment, and then in the second, the additional payment would go with outright sale of the estate. Two additional payments seems to be a widely accepted custom in Pingnan region.

⁴² The note in the record of 1805 that the grain tax had been transferred into their household should be the description of current situation, not what happened in 1805. The grain tax was only transferred in 1900 when these estates were sold outright.

⁴³ Gan, *Canye liushui gangmu*, 6.

The last record is to show that this entry had been reinvestigated by the government of the new regime, and the serial number of the new official certificate is provided. This simple entry succinctly summarizes several transactions related to this estate in three generations (Zhenzan-Qingbiao-Nianrui), and the information in related documents.

While this was a relatively simple record with only four different documents, in other records, more summaries were made for a single estate. For example, nine summaries were listed for an estate bought in 1822, which means that nine different documents of different transactions over this estate were made from 1822 to 1869. Without a written record, it would be difficult to manage these documents, as well as these estates. In other words, this booklet is “the document of documents,” made to manage these documents of properties. As the preface that Gan Qianchu wrote for this account states: “To investigate the numerous deeds and contracts of the estates left by our ancestors and the fields that I subsequently purchased is too difficult and laborious. It would be more convenient to collect them into a single account.....Therefore my sons and grandsons can read this account and know the records as they know their own fingers and palms. While they can read these records with their eyes, they can cherish these estates with their hearts.”⁴⁴ These sophisticated records, compiled with the knowledge of handling property documents, were for himself, as well as his descendants. Transmitting these written records was important in maintaining the corporate properties left by the ancestors and creating an extended material bond among family members through following generations.

⁴⁴ Gan, *Canye liushui gangmu*, 1.

Marketization and the Transformation of Economic Practices

The increasing number of contracts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicates that numerous minor landowners exchanged their lands for money via various transactions. These villagers in Pingnan not only traded their lands, but also borrowed money from the rich,⁴⁵ pawned the pigs they raised, and exchanged their labor for money.⁴⁶ Several related documents, such as loan agreements and labor contracts, were also made to fulfill villagers' demands for money. These documents, mostly written in the latter half of the nineteenth century, belong to a few major landlords who controlled the local flow of currency, and illustrate a trend that currency became very important in villagers' economic life during the nineteenth century. Not only lands, but also goods and service, were used by commoners to exchange for currency. This demand for currency can be taken as a continuous trend from the late Ming, when silver was used to pay for official taxes and duties and became common in commercial exchanges, and it was accelerated with the overall structural change of regional economy in northeastern Fujian during the nineteenth century.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, the economy of Pingnan was further integrated with regional and even international markets. Fuzhou was opened as a treaty port in 1844 after the first Opium War, and began foreign trade. In 1896, Sanduao was also opened to foreign trade, so that the goods flowing from Pingnan to overseas markets could be transported either via the Min River to Fuzhou, or via the Hutong River to Sanduao. In the mid-nineteenth century, tea and paper became the most important goods exported from

⁴⁵ I found one hundred and eighteen pieces of certificate of indebtedness in Pingnan villages from 1714 to 1949. Ninety-three of them were signed in the last seventy years of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁶ For example, Contracts No.25015, No.25035, No. 33007 and others.

Fujian,⁴⁷ and most of the tea was exported via Fuzhou and Sanduao. After the opening of these two ports, large-scale tea plantations became common in the Upper Min River Valleys, and Pingnan, together with many mountainous counties in Fujian, became a tea-exporting region.⁴⁸ Several rich families opened their tea-trading businesses beginning in the mid-nineteenth century—for example the Lu 陸 and Zhou families in Shuangxi, then the county seat, the Zhou family in Tangkou, the Su family in Shoushan 壽山 and the Zhang family in Jitou.⁴⁹ They became the agents who collected tea leaves from local tea farmers and transported them to Fuzhou and Sanduao after processing.⁵⁰

The economy of Pingnan had revived during the mid-eighteenth century since the reconstruction of local order; this can be observed by the increasing number of land

⁴⁷ In 1905, among the value of all the goods exported from Fujian, 25.7% came from papers, and 20.42% came from tea. In 1910, 20.85% came from tea and 18.12% came from paper. See *Fujian linian duiwai maoyi tongji ziliao* 福建歷年對外貿易統計 (Fuzhou: Fujian shen mishuchu gongbaoshi, 1935), 65.

⁴⁸ Among the three treaty ports (Fuzhou, Xiamen and Sanduao) in Fujian, Sanduao was the latest one, but it soon became very important in tea export. In 1900, only 8% of tea exported from Fujian went through Sanduao, but in 1905, 44% of tea went through Sanduao. In other words, the opening of Sanduao contributed greatly to the tea export in Fujian and further tea plantation in northeastern Fujian, which was the region that Sanduao served. See *Fujian linian duiwai maoyi tongji ziliao*, 80.

⁴⁹ A brief description of tea traders in Pingnan during the early twentieth century, see *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi*, 17/5. “Tea traders are in the county seat, Tangkou, Jitou, Guanshoudou 官壽兜 (i.e. Shoushan) and other places. Every year after Guyu (a solar term usually begins around April 20th and end around May 5th), they collect the black and green tea and sold them to the foreign countries. After the First World War, their business slightly declines.”

⁵⁰ The records of the amount of tea production in Pingnan during the nineteenth century were rare and random. For example, an investigation claims that a tea trader in Tangkou collected more than 1,400 *dan* of black tea, and a trader in Shoushan collected more than 1,000 *dan*. Another investigation showed that in 1929, villagers in Zhongyang 忠洋 produced 400 *dan* of tea, and each household produced 2 *dan*. In 1936, the tea production in Pingnan County was 6,500 *dan*. The tea production shrunk during the Sino-Japan war, when the ports were blockaded. In 1949, the production was down to 2,227 *dan*. However, tea plantation was still the main business in Pingnan. According to the survey of local government in 1947, among 83 local administrative units in Pingnan, 41 of them produced tea, and 3,885 households, among total 18,232 households in Pingnan, were tea farmers. See Huang Liangpeng 黃良彭 and Ye Chishao 葉持紹, “Pingnan chaye shengcan gaikuang 屏南茶葉生產概況,” *Pingnan wenshi ziliao* 屏南文史資料 10 (1989), 21-24; “Ge xiangzhen cancha diaocha 各鄉鎮產茶調查,” *Pingnan xian tongji shouce* 屏南縣統計手冊, (Pingnan: Pingnan xian zhengfu tongji shi, 1948), 40.

transactions. The rise of long-distance trade further brought Pingnan into an integrated regional and international market and accelerated the trend of marketization. In the 1740s the magistrate said there were almost no merchant and or market towns in Pingnan,⁵¹ but from the mid-nineteenth century on, several towns, such as Shuangxi, Jitou and Tangkou, became local distribution centers. Major families in these towns, who had accumulated a large number of estates, invested their capital into business, established trade agencies and set up branches in Fuzhou and nearby towns. The rise of local traders increased the circulation of currency, the transactions among properties, goods and money, and different kinds of financial operation.

The most successful example is the business career of Zhang Tianlin 張天霖 (1858-1930) in Jitou. Zhang Tianlin's grandfather had been a government student, and his father, Zhang Zhengzong 張正宗 (1816-1873), started his business as a small retailer in Jitou during the mid-nineteenth century. Zhang Tianlin inherited this business in 1878 after his father and uncle's deaths. Introduced by his relatives, he borrowed money from two rich people in other villages, and together with his own assets, he used these funds to expand his family business, importing goods, such as cloth, salt, tobacco and various luxuries, from Fuzhou. He soon became a primary retailer in this region, doing business with people in Pingnan and nearby counties, such as Zhenghe 政和, Jian'ou 建甌, Zhouning 周寧, Ningde and Gutian. After securely establishing his business foundation and his connections with Fuzhou, he started a business of overseas remittance. Oversea Pingnan people sent money to foreign banks in Fuzhou, which was far away from their

⁵¹ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 170.

relatives in Pingnan.⁵² Zhang Tianlin and his clerks then drew the money from the Fuzhou banks and used the money to purchase goods. The relatives of overseas Pingnan people received their money in Zhang Tianlin's Jitou agency. This business allowed Zhang Tianlin to control a large flow of cash, which could then be used in his investments. Afterwards, Jitou also became a financial center in this region.

Zhang's business continued to flourish in the early twentieth century. Before his death in 1930, he started a paper-trade business in Ningde in 1922, collecting and trading paper produced by local mills. His paper-trade business was large enough that he issued his own promissory notes, which were well circulated in Pingnan, Ningde and Gutian. In 1927, amassing capital from merchants in several villages, he established a cloth-trading company in Huotong town of Ningde. Through the trade route from Jitou, Huotong to Sanduao via the Huotong River, he imported foreign cloth from Shanghai, selling it to customers in this region.⁵³ Zhang Tianlin's business empire was built during the overall economic transformation in southeastern China. During this trend, even a mountain county like Pingnan was further integrated into the regional and global market. Based on the properties accumulated in previous generations and his own financial operations, Zhang

⁵² Comparing to southern and coastal Fujian, oversea Pingnan immigrants were much fewer, and started later. Pingnan people migrated to Sarawak in Borneo from the late nineteenth century. The first ones whose names are known to later generations moved to Sibu in Sarawak by the help of missionaries in 1899. Most of these immigrants started from workers in rubber plantation and gradually stepped into different business. The first high wave of migration was from 1912 to 1936, the chaotic warlord period. They established their own organizations there and continuingly invited their relatives in Pingnan until 1949. See *Pingnan xianzhi*, 25-1; Zhang Naihua 張乃華, "Pingnan huaqiao gaikuang 屏南華僑概況," *Pingnan wenshi ziliao* 屏南文史資料 10 (1989), 17-20.

⁵³ For Zhang Tianlin's business, see *Jitou Zhan-shi zupu bajia zhipu* 滌頭張氏族譜八家支譜, 258-261; Zhang Fengxuan 張奉瑄, "Jitou Zhang Maohu jingshang gaikuang 滌頭張茂祐經商概況," *Pingnan wenshi ziliao* 9 (1988): 85-89.

Tianlin took the chance of marketization and became a successful merchant in the Pingnan region.

His success certainly had to rely on several different kinds of knowledge and skills. Six account books surviving from his business in the early twentieth century meticulously list the quantities and values of goods and their trading partners in Ningde and Fuzhou. These books show the highly-developed skill of bookkeeping which was required in long-distance trade. Traders' skills in making business records and calculating had been polished for several generations from their management of lineage properties and land transactions, so that, in the late nineteenth century, it would not be difficult for the traders to learn the skill of making trade records through their contact with merchants in Gutian or Fuzhou, especially for Zhang Tianlin, whose grandfather had been a government student and whose father had started the business.

Another development following the trend of marketization was the use of promissory notes and other negotiable instruments. Although paper money had been used in China before, there was no evidence of its use in Pingnan before the mid-nineteenth century. The records in contracts, account books and genealogies show that only copper coins, silver taels and, much later, foreign silver coins were used as units of price and value. However, a kind of promissory note, locally called *bangpiao* 榜票, was circulated in Pingnan and the nearby region from the late nineteenth century on (Figure 23). These promissory notes were printed and issued by regional enterprises. With a certified stamp, they were worth the value written on them in units of foreign silver coins. To prevent counterfeiting, these notes were printed with many complicated words and several complicated red stamps. Except for the amount of value, all other information, such as the date and the location, was

printed by seals, and the amount was also later certified by being printed by stamps. The earliest printed promissory note I found in Pingnan was issued in 1889, and all of them were used in Jitou, one of the most prosperous commercial centers in Pingnan.



Figure 23 *Bangpiao* (locally issued promissory note, 1890)

There is no evidence to prove whether these notes were issued by enterprises in Fuzhou or ones in Pingnan; however, in 1920s, the business of Zhang Tianlin issued its own promissory notes. These notes were so widely circulated in three counties that some other competitive businessmen asked the local government to intervene. Although Zhang Tianlin claimed that these notes were only used in his paper trade, they were actually accepted by people in Pingnan, Ningde and Gutian as negotiable instruments.⁵⁴ In other words, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people in Pingnan became

⁵⁴ *Jitou Zhan-shi zupu bajia zhipu* 滌頭張氏族譜八家支譜, 259.

familiar with using paper notes in their transactions, so that local businessmen, such as Zhang Tianlin, could learn this practice and issue their own negotiable instruments. The credibility of written and printed texts was established under this consensus, by which long-distance exchanges were expected and value could be smoothly transmitted.

Contract Certificates and State Regulation

From the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, frequent land transactions and long-distance trades altered the face of trade in Pingnan, and more written and printed texts were used in economic activities. Although the texts mentioned above, such as land contracts and promissory notes, were all made by local people, the state always played a role in regulating these activities of exchange.

As mentioned earlier, during the Song dynasty several attempts to force people to use the standard contracts issued by the government and to officially register each contractual agreement eventually failed, but to some extent spread the formats of standard written contracts throughout the empire. During the Yuan dynasty, a form of certificate started to be issued as the official approval of contracts.⁵⁵ This certificate, which was attached to the end of contracts and therefore got the name *qiwei* (契尾, literally “end of the contract”), was further standardized during the early sixteenth century in the mid-Ming. After the interruption of the dynastic transition, the Qing dynasty revived the use of this document in 1647, and an edict by the Qianlong emperor in 1750 formalized the certificate, authorizing the Provincial Administration Commission in each province to print this document.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Zhou Shaoquan 周紹泉, “Tianzhai jiaoyi zhong de qiwei shitan 田宅交易中的契尾試探,” *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1 (1987): 100-102.

⁵⁶ Yang Guozhen, *Ming-Qing tudi qiyue wenshu yanjiu*, 54-58.

County governments issued the certificate after the contract tax was paid and the contract was registered in the county. A county serial number, a provincial serial number and a stamp were affixed to each certificate, on which the location of the land and the registered household that this land was transferred to were recorded. Local government and the new owner each preserved one half of the certificate with another official stamp on the cut side. The certificate indicated official approval of this contractual agreement and, in addition to the official stamp by the county government, the decree of the Qianlong emperor in 1750 was printed on the certificate as a symbol of imperial power (see Figure 24). All these wood-block printed contract certificates issued before the Republican era were printed by the Provincial Administration Commission and have the same format.

The earliest extant contract certificate that I could find in Pingnan was issued in 1808, but in private contract registers, the earliest official registered contract-certificate number can be traced to 1778.⁵⁷ It seems that, in Pingnan, the earliest officially registered contracts that villagers could trace in the late nineteenth century were registered in the late eighteenth century. When the political and social order had settled down and the relationships between the new county government and local families had been regularized, to protect the properties they accumulated in previous decades, several major families started to register their contracts with the county government. Although many transactions took place before 1778, none of them were registered in the county government.

⁵⁷ *Qibai zongbu*, 88.



Figure 24 Contract certificate (*Qiwei*, 1808)

Although this document was called “the end of the contract,” villagers attached the certificate to the earliest contracts for the piece of land in question, followed by all the related contracts in chronological order, and the last one was made for the latest exchange certified by the government. Many contracts in villages were tied together in this way as a long strip of paper. For example, an official certificate sealed in 1914 was attached with seven contracts, signed in 1808, 1814, 1816, 1859, and 1914, and two in 1821. This series of contracts, including the contracts of mortgage, additional payment, redeemable sale, and outright sale, together illustrated the transaction history of this piece of land, and proved the current owner’s legitimacy to local government and all the villagers.⁵⁸ This strip helped the owner to review all the transactions ever related to this piece of land. These

⁵⁸ No.41071-41077.

well-organized contracts with official certificates became powerful written evidence during any legal disputes regarding the property.

For the local government, the fees and taxes collected from contract certificates during this period were an important source of income. As the local gazetteer describes, the government of Pingnan County deemed the contract tax as important as land and head taxes.⁵⁹ Since the Qianlong reign, the fixed amount of all the land and household taxes collected in Pingnan was around 8,200 taels, but the taxes collected from contracts during the Guangxu reign (1875-1908) reached seven hundred taels each year. While the amounts of most taxes were fixed, the contract tax, depending on how many contractual transactions were made and registered, was more variable.⁶⁰ From the late nineteenth century on, during the general financial crisis at national and local levels, central and local governments used the name of “contract tax” to collect money. For example, on a Pingnan contract certificate issued in 1907, a note in red was printed on the original form, explaining that apart from the contract tax, five *qian* of foreign silver coins had to be paid for the cost of the “paper” of the certificate. Among these five *qian*, two *qian* had recently been added according to the new rules to support the new national law academy. Moreover, two more extra *qian* were collected for the local schools in Pingnan. Altogether seven *qian* had to be paid for the paper cost of the contract certificate.⁶¹ These fees collected through contract certificates, as was the case with *likin* 釐金 and other new taxes and fees upon

⁵⁹ *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi*, 10/4b; *Daoguang Pingnan xianzhi*, 1/37b.

⁶⁰ The rate of contract tax in Pingnan during the nineteenth century is unknown. However, during the early republican period in Pingnan, the tax for contracts of outright sale was two percent of the trading property value and the tax for contracts of mortgage (or redeemable sale) was one percent. *Minguo Pingnan xianzhi*, 10/7a.

⁶¹ No. 11052.

commercial activities,⁶² were used to support the expense of the New Policies Reform. This was particularly important for the impoverished local government, since their revenue was limited and the expenses had increased greatly during the New Policies era when local government had to initiate several new institutions, such as public schools.

In general, the Qing government mostly relied on income from land and head taxes, and rarely intervened or directly levied taxes upon commercial activities. However, once the market economy began to prosper, these contract certificates became a vehicle for the money-grubbing government to share in the profits from commercial exchanges. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the county government of Pingnan had been more active in issuing contract certificates and collecting the contract tax than before. This tendency was more apparent during the early Republican period. Under the chaos of the warlords, support from the central government was largely cut off, but there were still many expenses in running county administration and initiating new local projects. The increase of contract certificates in Pingnan during the early Republican period demonstrates a more forceful attempt by officials of the new regime to intervene in local economic activities. For example, in Zhang Honglu's register of contracts, there are sixty-six records of contract registrations or investigations from 1912 to 1935, comparing to forty-five records from 1714 to 1912. The new government started to tighten control from the very beginning. In 1913, the second year of the Republic, at least thirty-eight contracts were reregistered and

⁶² *Likin*, a special tax levied on goods in transit between provinces was originally a way to raise the fund to suppress Taiping rebels during the mid-nineteenth century, but gradually regularized and became an important financial source of local government. See Edwin George Beal, *The Origin of Likin, 1853-1864* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

taxed. Among them, thirty-five had never been officially registered before.⁶³ During the twenty-three years for which we have the records, several contracts were taxed more than once. For example, a contract made in 1814 was first registered and taxed in 1824 when this field was transferred to Zhang Honglu's registered household, the only time it was taxed during the Qing, but was taxed three times between 1915 and 1935.⁶⁴

The reregistration in 1913 reveals that although, according to the Qianlong emperor's edict of 1750, the contract had to be registered when the land was transferred to another household and a certificate with serial numbers was granted to the new owner, not all transactions during the Qing dynasty were actually registered. Both Zhang's and Gan's family registers of contracts left detailed records on the official registrations of the contracts. If the entry was registered and certified, the year of registration, the county magistrate's surname, and the provincial and county serial numbers of the certificate would be provided at the end of the entry. Not all contracts had to be certified and the contracts were not certified right after the contracts were made. In both Zhang's and Gan's records, the official certificates usually arrived several years after the contracts of outright sale were made. Among 120 purchases that the Zhang family made during the Qing dynasty, only forty-four of them had proof of official certification.⁶⁵ Among these forty-four, only six were made during the eighteenth century. Although it is impossible to lose the old

⁶³ The Gans' family register shared the same phenomenon. A large number of contracts were registered between 1913 and 1915.

⁶⁴ *Qibai zongbu*, 49.

⁶⁵ The Gans' register had the similar tendency. Among thirty entries of estate purchased during the Qing, four were certificated during the Qing, twelve were never certificated, and fourteen were only certificated during the mass registration in the first several years of the Republic. It seems the Gans had lower rate of certification than the Zhangs. However, many estates of the Gans were purchased in the last two decades of the Qing dynasty, so there was no much time left for them to register the contracts under the Qing regime.

certificates and the records of serial numbers, more than half of the entries were not officially registered and did not have certificates. It explains why 650 contracts made during the nineteenth century were found in Pingnan, but only thirteen contract certificates survive.

The disproportion between the number of contracts and the number of contract certificates suggest a space between the official regulation and local people's response. The expanse of this space was flexible, and depended on the condition of both sides. For most of the Qing dynasty, the government did not fully control contractual activities by granting certificates. Their limited administrative power did not allow them to supervise all contractual agreements. However, when new official institutions were created, such as the establishment of Pingnan County or the Republican regime, or the financial demand arose, the government might tighten the control and more actively supervise contract-making. Whereas for local landowners the most important reasons for being certified were to prevent from harassment from tax agents, as the Qianlong emperor's edict suggested, and to provide the evidence for legal cases when disputes happened, rich families accumulating multiple properties, such as Zhang Honglu's, tended to be the targets of tax harassment and to be involved in property disputes. They could also afford the expense of contract taxes in exchange for official protection. This explains why more contract certificates were found in the registers of rich families, but fewer from commoner families who did not have many land transactions and tended to avoid the contract tax. Even the rich families did not certify all their contracts nor register them right away. Since privately written contracts had enough credibility to support a transaction, traders only registered transactions when it was necessary. The production of these official contract certificates was to some extent the

result of negotiations between the official power and local people over economic transactions.

Based on his observation of the language used in the contracts of Minong 瀾濃, Taiwan, Myron Cohen points out the “dual status” of contracts as “local acts of legitimization” and as “potential though very rarely used evidence for appeal to the state.” This “documentary duality,” according to him, is a “reflection of how even a local community remotely located on the periphery of the empire was nevertheless connected to the imperial state in many ways.....at the same time that it was configured by its own local history and self-constituted and self-regulating in almost all aspects of life.”⁶⁶ The cases in Pingnan show that the shadow of empire upon private contractual activities was not confined to the indirect influence on the language of contracts and occasional legal cases. Contract certificates, as an official means of documenting the production of private documents, were the empire’s attempt to directly control private contracts. They started to appear more frequently when this peripheral region moved toward the empire and the regional market, though self-regulation from local communities was still the main force for legitimizing these documents. This crucial change was both political and economic. The strength of the regulation depended on both the development of the state power at local level, and the development of economic exchanges in regional markets.

⁶⁶ Myron L. Cohen, “Writs of Passage in Late Imperial China: The Documentation of Practical Understanding in Minong, Taiwan,” *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*, 43.

Conclusion

There were at least two dimensions of the role of written texts in economic activities: they were vehicles of communication between traders, and, at the same time, they recorded the results of economic exchanges.

The written texts, such as contracts and house-dividing documents, provided a consistent framework inside which owners could exchange property on a consensual basis. This framework became more important when the scope of exchanges expanded and people had to trade with someone far away from their own community, probably with different economic concepts and experiences. In this circumstance, a formulated written text channeled both involved parties into a certain mode that both could agree on. While economic exchanges are to some extent a kind of communication, written texts played an important role as the media of this communication.

However, it took time for a certain mode of economic exchange to be formulated into written texts and well-accepted by a local community. When a villager in the valleys of Pingnan compiled a written contract to regulate his transactions, such as completely selling his field to another villager or asking for additional payment for a sold field, he actually followed a mode of exchange which had a long history of evolution and had been formulated into written texts.

Moreover, written documents, such as contracts, registers and account books, were also indispensable for recording the results of economic exchanges. They made these negotiated results permanent and manageable. Abstract economic modes and values became tangible after being recorded in texts. These tangible modes and values were, to some degree, the basis of negotiable instruments, by which Zhang Tianlin's family

business could issue their own promissory notes which could be accepted by people in different counties who had never met face-to-face. Reifying common modes and values into tangible forms, managers could pursue greater profits and develop better strategies of financial operations.

However, these documents were not spontaneously accepted by all the members of a community from the very beginning. The penetration of economic texts into a local community had a historical process, which was connected to its general social and economic development. For example, David Faure insists that land contracts in the Pearl River Delta became popularized from the early Ming to the mid-Qing only after the official registration system provided a legal framework.⁶⁷ In the case of Pingnan, although this textual tradition might have existed in earlier times, the key moment for its resurgence was in the early eighteenth century, following the restoration of social and political order. When the leading families regained their political and social dominance, they also tried to restore economic order and secure their economic accumulation. The first challenge they had to face was how to transfer their economic accumulation to their descendants without decreasing the solidarity of the group. A written house-dividing document in the form of allotment was thus adopted, and a part of the property was kept as a whole to create material bonds among divided families. As these undivided corporate properties were accumulated generation by generation, in order to better manage these properties and avoid possible disputes, a further agreement would be made among descendants who shared the

⁶⁷ David Faure, "Contractual Arrangements and the Emergence of a Land Market in the Pearl River Delta, 1500 to 1800," in Chen Chiu-kun 陳秋坤 and Hong Liwan 洪麗完, eds., *Qiyue wenshu yu shehui shenghuo, 1600-1900 契約文書與社會生活(1600-1900)* (Taipei: Institute of Taiwanese History, Academia Sinica, 2001) 265-283. However, the role of the state and official registration on the use of contracts might be overstated in his argument.

ownership, and a common and open property register had to be created. In some cases, a representative committee or a professional manager was even set to impartially and efficiently deal with them.

Along with the restoration of economic order, leading families started to accumulate their properties by purchasing others' fields. In need of money, minor families sold their fields or even became tenants. The consequence of a flourishing land market was the segmentation of land rights and the complication of modes of exchange. Under these circumstances, formulated contracts became necessary in land-transaction practices. To manage these properties and their complicated transactions, rich families, with their long experience of dealing with lineage properties and contracts, in the nineteenth century compiled registers of contracts. At the same time, minor families who sold their lands were also involved in the written tradition of economic texts. While house-dividing documents or registers of properties might only be held by the rich, poor families would have to deal with contracts, receipts and other agreements just as the rich did. They could be poor and illiterate, but their economic life was also regulated by written texts.

A further development was during the latter half of the nineteenth century. After the opening of Fuzhou and Sanduao, Pingnan was integrated into the regional and international market. Long-distance trades were operated by families with assets and knowledge. Their experience in managing land contracts and lineage properties was translated into business, exporting tea and paper from Pingnan and importing foreign goods. With the advent of commoditization, currency became more important. Not only did different forms of currency – silver taels, copper coins and foreign silver coins – intermittently appear in the account books, but local business also issued their own promissory notes. With proper

stamps, these printed paper slips could be used as cash during trade. Ordinary villagers did not have many chances to sell their land by means of written contracts, but when promissory notes or other paper currencies prevailed, they would have more chances to use them to purchase commodities. By these means, written texts penetrated into the lower stratum of local society in the economic realm.

Historical developments in Pingnan during these two hundred years were not confined to the transformation of economic structure from relative isolation from commercial markets to integration into flourishing regional and global markets, but were also a process whereby more local people came to use more and more written texts in their increasingly complicated economy. These texts made economic behavior more predictable and more manageable. Related families, with written agreements and account books, could better work together and benefit from their corporate properties. A family, or family-alliance, with better knowledge and more assets could better deploy their economic resources and maximize their profits. These families, who were familiar with how to use written texts, together stimulated local economic activities and connected themselves to regional and global markets.

From this perspective, what influenced local economy was not limited to economic factors. Since written texts were important in economic exchanges and better management required a certain level of knowledge about dealing with documents, literary skills played a crucial part. The rich people who were equipped with these skills from their previous experience occupied a better position from which to extend their economic powers. At the same time, while expanding their economic influence in local society, they also further popularized the use of written documents, such as contracts, promissory notes or

certificates of indebtedness. The popularization of written texts in the economic realm and the concentration and circulation of economic resources were therefore interlocked with each other as the primary forces in transforming the structure of local economies.

Chapter 7 Ritual: Ritual Texts and Ritual Tradition

Although “traditional rituals” were revived in Pingnan, as well as in many villages in China, starting in the late 1980s,¹ many old collections of ritual texts have been lost. Ritual specialists collected new copies or recovered a few surviving texts, but the original organization of these texts has been obliterated. It is therefore difficult to trace the sources of these texts and know how they were collected. A rare exception is the collection of Chen Daoxian (陳道現, secular name: Chen Ziming 陳子命). Chen Daoxian was a ritual specialist in Longtan. His collection of ritual texts was relatively intact throughout the Cultural Revolutions, and preserved the traces of previous owners from the early eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. It provides us a concrete case to explore the accumulation of ritual texts in these two hundred years. This chapter is based on his collection attempts to discuss the use of texts in ritual performance.

Even though the previous chapters mainly focused on villagers’ “secular” lives, the term “rituals” has been mentioned on several occasions. The annual ritual of ancestral worship was critical to the formation of lineage organization. When a descent group tried to establish a lineage organization, one of the first steps was to establish the communal ritual of ancestral worship and compile a register. The ritual to worship local deities was very important, too. We read about their efforts to build or rebuild local

¹ Also see the case in Putian: Kenneth Dean, “The God Returns,” in Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain, Volume One: Historical Introduction to the Return of the Gods* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 3-284.

temples or place altars into covered bridges. The temples and bridges marked the boundaries among communities.

Rituals were apparently an essential component of village life. There are at least two approaches to understanding them in the Chinese history literature. Historians tend to focus on the significance of a ritual in a specific community in its social and historical contexts. Many studies attempted to examine how a ritual unity or multiple ritual alliances were organized and transformed, such as the changing participants and parade routes of a festival in a rising market town, or the formation of ritual alliances on a coastal plain.² While historians are most interested in “contexts,” scholars of religious studies tend to pay more attention to the “contents” of rituals. They peruse the details of ritual performance and analyze the symbolic meanings of each procedure and element. By decoding these procedures and elements, scholars trace its religious origin and identify the traditions it inherits.³ While the former focuses on the social formation but pays less attention to the content of ritual and its actual practices, the later tends to provide a static analysis of ritual structure but discuss less on the historical transformation of ritual and its social background.

This subtle difference might result from the primary sources they rely on. Historical studies of rituals mostly depend on the descriptions in local gazetteers, lineage documents, stone inscriptions, and literary writings. These historical descriptions were mostly created by the observers or participants and seldom

² For example, Chen Chunsheng, “Xinyang kongjian yu shequ lishi de yanbian: yi Zhanglin de shenmiao xitong wei li 信仰空間與社區歷史的演變：以樟林的神廟系統為例,” *Qingshi yanjiu* 2(1999): 1-13; Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances in the Putian Plain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

³ See John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), several articles in Emily Martin and Arthur Wolf, eds., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) and numerous fieldwork reports by Chinese and western scholars.

concentrate on the details of ritual practice. The religious studies mostly rely on scholars' own observation in the fieldworks and their reading of ritual manuals and other ritual texts created for or during the ritual. While fieldwork provides the information of current performance, ritual texts might contain the details in the past. However, most ritual texts are difficult to be dated. Moreover, because the authority of most rituals was provided by their connection to a permanent order, which is usually symbolized by written texts, these texts seldom reveal their association to the changing secular society.

To historicize the ritual texts and contextualize the contents of ritual is a challenge to both historians and scholars of religious studies. Most of our concepts and theories of rituals are developed by the early fieldworks of anthropologists who studied nonliterary societies or societies with little literary traditions. They focused on the aspect of action and performance, but less on written texts. However, in Chinese local societies, which have a long tradition of textual practices, most scholars would agree that written texts created for rituals play an important role in their practices. Most rituals in Chinese local society were performed by ritual specialists, who used specific manuscripts for specific rituals. These manuscripts, inherited from previous specialists, became the source of authority for the rituals and an essential component of the whole ritual performance. Furthermore, these written texts also bridge the current performance of ritual to a historical past, by which a sense of continuity is created even though the society has been changed and so might the ritual practices.

Based on the ritual texts I collected in Pingnan villages, this chapter is an attempt to understand these texts in their local contexts, their significance to ritual practices and to general textual culture. I start from the general outline of ritual performance in

Pingnan and then focus on the history of a collection of ritual texts preserved by a family of ritual specialists.

The Ritual Life in Pingnan

According to Pingnan gazetteers during the Qing, villagers' life was paced by a series of rituals.⁴ Calendric rites started from the first day of the first month, and were constantly held throughout the year. Some calendric rituals were seasonal, such as the ritual on the New Year's Eve and the ritual of harvest in spring and fall; some of them were commemorative, such as the celebration of a deity's birthday but many of them were a mix of both. For example, the fifteenth day of the first month, the first full-moon of the year, was on the one hand taken as "Shangyuan 上元," a seasonal ritual date, and on the other hand the birthday of the Lady of Linshui, the most popular regional deity in northeastern Fujian. A ritual of celebration was held in the villages with a temple of her on this day, and sometimes a pilgrim to her original temple in Gutian was led by local ritual specialists – a tradition started no later than the mid-eighteenth century and has been revived now after the interruption since the Cultural Revolution. In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, so-called "Zhongyuan 中元," another remarkable date, a rite was held to donate food and money to the ghosts and accumulate merits to ancestors. This rite became the occasion for descendants to show their filial piety to deceased parents and ancestors. Both Shangyuan and Zhongyuan were seasonal and at the same time commemorative. These calendric rites made villagers' yearly schedule and punctuated their daily life. Although local gazetteers tended to timelessly describe

⁴ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 7/17-18.

these annual schedules, these rituals were not unchanged, and were not necessarily formed or brought to this region at the same period. In many cases, local gazetteers tended to copy previous editions for the section of “custom” and made their description ahistorical.

In addition to these annual calendric rituals recorded in gazetteers, numerous non-calendric rites were held for particular occasions. Life-cycle rites were held at almost every important stage of life: name-giving to the newborn child, coming of age, marriage, and funeral. Marriage and funeral ceremonies were particularly important and recorded in the early local gazetteer.⁵ Like these “rites of passages,” many rituals were related to the change of status or life condition, such as moving into a new house or traveling to the unpredictable outside world. Other rituals were held to ask for specific blessings or prevent from evil elements, such as the hunting ritual, which before hunting invited forest and mountain spirits to help the hunters to catch the games, or the cross-the-passes ritual, which invited heavenly soldiers to fight against evil ghosts around the growing children. While these two were preventive, some were aimed to solve immediate problems: the rite to invite rain during the drought, to dispel tigers, or to get rid of the evil spirits that harassed crying babies. Overall, while calendric rites set the rhythms of villagers’ yearly schedule, these non-calendric rites protected villager’s personal life experiences, and helped them to overcome the life challenges.

Many rituals, such as the ritual of ancestral worship or funeral ceremony, are assumed to be universal in China by literati and officials. They are associated with certain cultural values, and local officials and literati often criticized the inappropriate

⁵ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 7/19-21a.

performance of these rituals by local people. Many are rather regional and attached to local traditions. For example, the Lüshan 閩山 tradition had a strong influence in northeastern Fujian, because the original temple of the Lady of Linshui was situated in a Gutian village, and she became one of the most important early masters of Lüshan tradition during the late Ming. Several rituals of dispelling evil spirits, such as “the cross-the-passes,” were particularly claimed to be directed by the Lüshan tradition. Many other rituals were claimed to originate from Buddhism or Daoism, and the fusions of different traditions were often.

Moreover, even in the same region, every village had its own ritual schedule. Most villages had one temple for their “Master of Precinct” (*tuozhu* 拓主 or *jingzhu* 境主). This tutelary protector could be popular deities, such as the Supreme Emperor of Mysterious Heaven (*xuantian shangdi* 玄天上帝) and the Great Sage Equal to Heaven (*qitian dasheng* 齊天大聖), or regional and local deities, such as the Lady of Linshui and Tiger Lady Jiang (*jianghupuo* 江虎婆). Many of their worship were shaped during the Ming dynasty as the integration between local deities and the official *she* altars,⁶ but most villages had more than one temple within their territories. For example, in Jitou, the Lady of Linshui and his husband were their Masters of Precinct, but the Great Sage Equal to Heaven was their primary protector of their community. In Jixia, one temple of the Flying Grand King (飛來大王 *Feilai dawang*) and the Lady of Linshui

⁶ See Michael Szonyi, “The Local Cult: *Lijia*, Lineage, and Temple,” *Practicing Kingship*, 169-196; Zheng Zhenman, “Shenmiao jidian yu shequ fazhan moshi: Putian jiangkou pingyuan de lizheng 神廟祭典與社區發展模式：莆田江口平原的例證,” and “Ming-Qing Fujian lishe zuzhi de yanbian 明清福建里社組織的演變,” in *Xianzu yu guojia*, 210-237, 238-256.

was situated at the “head of water,”⁷ the temple of the Lady of Ma was in the center of the village as their principal temple, and another three deities were worshipped on three different bridges, and one of them at the “end of water.”⁸ Besides, *Guandi* was worshipped in a pavilion built in the nineteenth century, and several minor temples, such as the Grand King Lin (林公大王), were in different corners of the village. According to local ritual specialists, there were at least eleven temples within the boundaries of Jixia, from the very large of the Lady of Ma, to some covered altars on the side of roads. These deities together composed the realm of gods in Jixia. Since every deity had his or her own birthday to celebrate and other related rituals, every village had at least one primary ritual of their own and a schedule of rituals different from other villages.

Celebrating the birthday of the Master of Precinct or the primary protector of the village was a communal ritual for all the villagers in the same territorial unit, whereas worshipping ancestors was another communal ritual for all the lineage members in the same kinship unit. Besides these communal rituals, different rituals had different levels of participants. Even the same deity might have rituals for different participants. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Lady of Ma in Jixia could be taken as the community deity and worshipped by the residents in Jixia. Her temple in Jixia could be taken as the original temple in this region, and during the tour the villages with the temple of the Lady Ma also worshipped the deity from Jixia. Because according to the

⁷ Most villages here were built along or across a stream in Pingnan. A temple was usually built at the riverbank or on the bridge at the point where the stream flowed into the village, which was called *shuitou* 水頭 (the head of water), and another was built where the stream flowed out of the village, called *shuiwei* 水尾 (the end of water). These two temples were to protect the village from evil spirits coming from outside, and marked the boundaries of a village.

⁸ The one at the tail of water was the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, and the other two on the bridges were *Guanyin* and the Supreme Emperor of Mysterious Heaven.

legend, she was brought to Pingnan from Zhejiang by the founding ancestor of the Gan family, she was also taken as the lineage protector,⁹ and worshipped by all the people with the surname Gan in this region, whether there was a temple of her in their residential communities or not. Moreover, any people could come to her temple and make a wish. The temple of the Lady of Ma in Jixia has many silver plates made in the nineteenth century. These were donated by the people whose wishes were realized after praying to her. These prayers came from different villages in this region, and these golden plates became the common property of the Jixia Gans. Although there was only one temple of the Lady of Ma in Jixa, her circle of worshipping was multi-layered and included different groups of followers. Although all were held in her temple based on the belief of her, different rituals had different participants. During the Qing dynasty, the kinship unit, the territorial unit and the unit of local cult sometimes overlapped with one another,¹⁰ but were not always the same.

In addition to these communal rituals, many rituals were participated in by a smaller group of people, such as the ritual of marriage, or even held for just one person, such as for the rituals to dispel evil spirits or cure disease. Communal rituals were mostly practiced in an open space, and several kinds of ritual spaces, such as temples and ancestral halls, were initially created for these rituals. The space for the most important communal ritual often occupied the center of the community, and usually became the primary space for public affairs. Almost all the rituals in Pingnan were led by one or more than one ritual specialists. Except for a few ceremonies that were led by

⁹ The story of the Lady of Ma from Zhejiang to Pingnan was written by unknown local literates, and several identical copies exist. However, several different versions of oral histories are still told by local people now.

¹⁰ As for the development of the relationships among these three units during the Ming, see Szonyi, *Practicing Kingship*, 169-196.

Buddhist monks, most rituals in Pingnan were practiced by specialists who, according to the ritual tradition they claimed, identified themselves as *dosu*, the Daoist Master or *ongsai*, the name for the specialist of local cults. A few rituals, such as the ritual of ancestral worship, were not led by ritual specialists. Although these “Confucian” required local literates to prepare the ritual texts, the rituals were led by lineage chiefs and these literates who actually conducted the ritual did not specifically identify themselves as “ritual masters,” or so-called *lisheng* 禮生, which was a distinguished status in many parts of Fujian.¹¹

The issue of diversity and complexity in village rituals becomes even more complicated once we consider the factor of “history.” It is relatively easy to depict a static structure of ritual performance in a community. Both books and contemporary informants would provide you a comprehensive and static picture of local rituals, which seemed to be performed in this place forever. However, no one would claim this structure of rituals came as it is now since the village was established, and stayed the same throughout centuries. While each ritual might come to villages at different times with different cultural or social backgrounds, the villages’ social and economic structures also changed over time. What makes it more difficult is that one important feature of ritual is its formalism and invariance. Most rituals required to be precisely repeated as a particular tradition. Since this is where its authority came from, the element of “change” was avoided by most rituals and the historical traces were hardly kept in related materials.

¹¹ As for Confucian ritual masters in Fujian villages, see Liu Yonghua, *Confucian Rituals and Chinese Villagers: Ritual Change and Social Transformation in a Southeastern Chinese Community, 1368-1949* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013). His research is based on the villages in southwestern Fujian.

In addition to the descriptions in local gazetteers or other literary materials, there might be three possibilities to reach the history of ritual practices. The first one is examining the history of the construction of ritual spaces. Knowing when and how the ritual spaces, such as temples, graves, and ancestral halls, were constructed helps us to infer the development of communal rituals. The second one is examining the historical formation of local ritual specialists. Knowing when ritual specialists started to appear in a community and how they transmitted their knowledge and organized themselves helps us to infer the degree of specialization of rituals. The third one is examining ritual texts, which is the focus of this chapter.

It is easier to study the historical construction of the ritual spaces in a community, if we have the related records in local gazetteers, genealogies and stone inscriptions. Tracing the historical formation of the group of ritual specialists is relatively difficult. In order to support their claims of being the successor of a long tradition, some ritual specialists preserved the genealogical line of their teachers and masters. However, even though this information is available in written texts or oral history, most of them do not provide the historical contexts, including the basic information such as birth years of their forerunners. Moreover, in most cases, only the ordained or religious names were recorded (or remembered), so that it is almost impossible to find their correlated positions in genealogies or other documents. Compared to ritual spaces and ritual specialists, ritual texts have the richest information, but to trace their histories is also the most difficult task. Before tracing the historical formation of ritual texts in Pingnan, I start from the textual materials we have and their functions in rituals.

The System of Texts in Pingnan Rituals

The preservation of historical ritual texts varies from place to place. Although older texts are usually appreciated and ritual specialists tended to preserve them as precious assets, many of them were taken as the symbol of “feudal superstition” and destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. After a long period of hostility toward traditional cult practices from the state and the literate class, ritual practices were interrupted in many places. Once old ritual specialists passed away and no one resumed their positions, many texts were discarded or even burnt. Although Pingnan villages faced exactly the same situation, fortunately some local ritual specialists kept the texts they inherited from their teachers and masters. The oldest ones in my survey were copied in the early eighteenth century, and more were copied in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These written texts were all created for or during ritual performance but related to different aspects of ritual. I briefly break them into three large categories by their characteristics: communicative, performative and declarative. Each category corresponds to one aspect of ritual, and most ritual texts in practice are cross-categories

Communicative Texts

A large portion of ritual texts were ephemeral documents created for a single ritual and soon eliminated during or after it. Most of these texts were used to communicate with supernatural powers: deities, ghosts or ancestors. Almost all of their formats followed the similar communicative texts in the secular world, especially the bureaucratic documents of the state.

The bureaucratic imagery of the power structure in Chinese religion has been noticed and widely discussed, first by anthropologists and later by historians and

scholars of religious studies.¹² It started early but the Song dynasty was a decisive period when the bureaucratic model expanded to a wider geographical scope and penetrated into lower ranges of the belief system. The Song emperors eagerly entitled regional deities and integrated them into the state religion.¹³ Many regional or local deities, such as *Mazu* or the Lady of Linshui, were granted a title by the court, and it became a trend that other minor deities, once their influence increased, were entitled by local followers as well. Royal, civil and military titles, such as Duke, General, Prince, Heavenly Concubine or Lady, were given to local deities who were looking for a position in the pantheon. This development went together with the growing system of Daoist theology, led by the Emperors of Three Realms (*sanguan dadi* 三官大帝) or the Jade Emperor (*yuhuang dadi* 玉皇大帝), and followed by various deities, heavenly soldiers and envoys in the Heavenly Bureau (*tiancai* 天曹).

To contact these deities, ritual specialists used different documents for different kinds of communications. According to the purposes of communication and the ranks of the objects (such as “emperor,” “king,” “official,” or “soldiers”) that the ritual specialists tried to contact, these documents took various titles, such as *zou* 奏 (memorial), *shu* 疏 (petition), *zhuang* 狀 (plea), *bang* 榜 (announcement), or *die* 牒 (correspondence), mimicking bureaucratic documents and their formats. For example, in a ritual for pacifying the soul of women dying in childbirth, a *zhuang* (plea) had to be

¹² For example, Arthur Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors” in Arthur Wolf et al, eds., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 131-182 and Emily Martin Ahern, *Chinese Ritual Politics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1981). Also see the brief review, Meir Shahar and Robert Weller, “Introduction: Gods and Society in China,” in Meir Shahar and Robert Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), 1-36.

¹³ Peter N. Gregory and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Religious and Historical Landscape,” in Ebrey and Gregory eds., *Religion and Society in T’ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993), 8-9; Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276*.

sent to the deities to dispel the evil spirits harassing this woman and her family members. A ritual specialist's collected exemplars provided a blank form for this document:

The plaintiff, faithful follower [the plaintiff's name], residing in the [place name] villages, [place name] precinct (境 *jing*)¹⁴, [number] *bao*, [number] *du*, Pingnan County, Fujian Province, issues this plea for pleading for the urgent investigation over the death in childbirth and saving our lives. [the plaintiff's name] did not know what mistakes I made, and should be forgiven from the punishment. My wife [the wife's last name] was born in [number] year, [number] month, [number] day, and [number] hour, and lived for [number] years. In this month, she died while giving childbirth, and all the family members are terrified and deeply sorrowful. I issue this plea with tears, pleading under the terrace of the Twenty-Four Venerable Heavenly Guardians of the Golden Light,¹⁵ and before the Tutelary Deity of Our Precinct¹⁶ and all the Divine Generals in the altar. I humbly wish that you can bestow the great mercy upon me, condescendingly investigating whether [the wife's last name] was haunted by evil spirits or not. If so, drive [the evil spirits] out, save our ant-like lives, and grant us peace and security. Whoever in your glow can be blessed, and our ant-like lives can be secured. The mercy you bestow on us will be equal to making us a new life. This is what I am pleading for.

[Number] year, [Number] month, [Number] day. Follower, [the plaintiff's name] respectfully kneels down and bows, submitting this plea.¹⁷

This "plea" is supposed to be written on paper before the ritual, being recited in the public and then burnt during the ritual. It was believed that this kind of unexpected death was caused by the attack of evil spirits to the family and a ritual had to be performed to pacify them. Following the rising smoke of the burning paper, this plea would be sent to the deities in the heaven. The format and the language of this plea

¹⁴ In these ritual documents, a territorial unit, *jing*, was placed above residential villages (*cun* 村), and below officially administrative unit *bao* and *du*. Each *jing* had a "Master of the Precinct" (*jingzhu* 境主), whose hierarchy is higher than "earth god" (*tudi shen* 土地神) but lower than "city god" (*chenghuang* 城隍). This unity *jing* is only used for rituals and never appears in secular documents.

¹⁵ These "Twenty-Four Venerable Heavenly Guardians" (*ershisi juntian* 二十四尊天) came from the Golden Light Sutra of Mahayana Buddhism, and were transformed into folk religions.

¹⁶ The original term "Wisdom King" (*mingwang* 明王) was also the Buddhist deity, but it was also merged with folk religion. In this context, it denotes the tutelary deity.

¹⁷ *Touci zhuangshi* 投詞狀式, 4-5.

followed the plaint in the secular legal procedure. The deities who were pleaded were the guardian and tutelary deities. They had the power to deploy the heavenly generals to dispel evil spirits, and here in the plaint, were given the roles of local and higher officials, who ordered their military subordinates to inspect criminal cases and protect their subjects. Each genre has its own function in ritual. *Zhuang* (or sometimes *touzhuang* 投狀) was used to report one's grievance or misery and plead for the intervention from supernatural powers. *Shu* (petition) was a general document for making a report to the deities or make the wish to them. *Zou* (memorial) was used to make a report to the highest level of deities, and *shen* 申 was the report to the second highest level of deities.

Each genre of documents with its own function was used to serve different parts of the ritual. In a large rite or ceremony, many kinds of documents had to be prepared beforehand. For example, the table of content of a mid-eighteenth-century collection of the documents used in the Great Longhua Ceremony (*longhua shenghui* 龍華勝會) listed nineteen *zou*, twelve *shen*, thirty-six *die*, ten *biao* 表(statement to the high-level deities), nineteen *shu*, fifteen *gai* 給(indenture), ten *guan* 關(order), seven *zajian* 雜件(miscellany), fourteen *bang*, thirty-six *jinzhuang* 進狀(letter of bequest) and thirty-six *xianzhuang* 獻狀(letter of donation).¹⁸ This collection has at least six volumes,¹⁹ and provides each document a well-written exemplar. Although many documents in the same genre in this collection are basically the same and the specialist only had to change the title of receiver and other details, this collection shows how complexly that

¹⁸ *Xinji longhua shenghui wenjian* 新集龍華勝會文檢.

¹⁹ The last surviving volume, the sixth volume stopped at *bang*.

the ritual documents had developed, and how a grand ceremony relied on the production of so many documents, prepared beforehand or written during the ceremony.

The collection of Longhua ceremony documents is a collection of documents used in a multi-day ceremony, but not all the rituals were as huge as the Longhua ceremony. Most ritual-centered collections of communicative texts are smaller, but no less comprehensive. For example, in a nineteenth-century collection of the documents used in a one-day ceremony included one *die*, four *shu*, and a two-part indenture. The purpose of this ceremony was to donate money to the underworld and purify the souls of the donor's parent so that the donor's parents could gain merits and rise to the heaven earlier. At the beginning of this ceremony, the ritual specialist had to send a general correspondence (*die*) to all the related deities to inform the purpose of this ceremony. According to the exemplar, "except for those I have sent a special correspondence, this correspondence is sent to [the deities' names] for explaining the purpose [of the ceremony].....When this official document arrives at your desk, I humbly plead you to follow it."²⁰ Following that, the specialist sent out the first petition (*qiqian shu* 起錢疏) to the Tutelary Deity of Our Precinct and the Master of Our Precinct, pleading them to supervise the divine soldiers and divine horses, which transported money to the hands of clerks of underworld treasury, and open the gate to the underworld. The second petition (*gongwang shu* 供王疏) was sent to the Great Emperors of Four Palaces (*sifu dadi* 四府大帝) and the Benevolent Kings of Ten Halls (*shidian ciwang* 十殿慈王) in the underworld, pleading them to receive the money (the petition even suggested them to "carefully check the amount you receive with the inventory, so that there will not be

²⁰ *Yizhouye gongjian* 一晝夜公檢, 2.

any discrepancy”²¹) and exonerate the souls of the parent so that he or she could get out of the torture in the underworld. The third petition (*shishi wenshu* 施食文疏) was sent to Guanyin 觀音, the sinicized Avalokiteśvara who saves people from miseries, pleading her to save the unworshipped wandering ghosts to whom the donors gave money, food and clothes. The last petition (*qingshui wenshu* 請水文疏) was sent to Guanyin and the Dragon Deity of Water Palace (水府龍神), pleading them to splash holy water and purify the altar so that the living world would not be influenced by the evil spirits from the underworld. This action was to make sure that the living world could return to normal after the ceremony that opened the gate to the underworld.

After these petitions and correspondence to deities, a two-part indenture had to be made. This indenture was to make sure that all the clerks of the four treasuries had received the right amount of money carried by divine soldiers and divine horses, and checked it with the inventory and its serial numbers. Because there were many people with the same name in the underworld, to ensure accurate receipt, this indenture had to be made with seals of all these treasures and offices. The right part of this document was given to the donor and the soul of the donor’s parent as a voucher so that he or she could take it to the offices in the underworld, eliminating his or her demerits and, depending on the result of merit accumulation, rising to the heaven. The left part was preserved by the “merit calculator” in the Office of Merit Calculation of the Heavenly Bureau (天曹較量院都功德案主). He would check the seal of the voucher with the dead, eliminate the demerits according to the voucher, and decide whether this soul had enough merits to rise to the heaven or not. At the end of this indenture, it noted that

²¹ *Yizhouye gongjian*, 8.

these documents had to be transferred to related offices and bureaus, informing the clerks there, and the copies of this part of indenture had to be sent to the other three treasuries of the underworld.²²

In this ceremony, not only the forms of these documents – correspondences, petitions, indentures – resembled the secular ones, but also the documentary operation was derived from the secular bureaucratic system. These realistic and complicated documents made the ceremony rather a series of documentary communication with the “divine bureaucracy.”²³ All these performances were to make sure that these documents would be properly sent to the deities and right clerks in the Heavenly Bureau, and the wishes from the secular world could be transmitted to them. The ritual specialist, as the middleman between the human world and supernatural powers, was to some degree an attorney, who prepared all the documents and processed them in a complicated system that his client could not manage by himself.

With so many different kinds of communicative texts, it became a challenge for ritual specialists to follow the right formats and produce the right texts. Hence, various *shi* (式 formulary) or *wenjian* (文檢 exemplar collection) were required for a qualified ritual specialist. While the two collections mentioned above are ritual-centered for a single ceremony, many others are collected by genre. For example, an 1874 hand-copied manual, *Zajian shushi* 雜件疏式 (Formulary of Miscellaneous Petitions) collected forty-five forms of *shu*. The occasions for using these *shu* in this formulary varied from dispelling a tiger, asking for a son, treating sick eyes to preventing the

²² *Yizhouye gongjian*, 16-25.

²³ Among several studies on the documents of communication in Daoist ritual, the recent book by Stephan Bumbacher systematically traces the origins of these “tallies,” “petitions” and “scriptures” to medieval and early China. See Stephan Peter Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing: Exorcistic and Apotropaic Rituals in Medieval China* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines, 2012).

whole community from contagious diseases.²⁴ This kind of genre-centered collection was more flexible, and allowed ritual specialists to pick the proper documents to use in a ritual. Generally speaking, these *shi* and *wenjian* not only helped ritual specialists prepare the texts for the rituals, but also standardized the forms of these texts.

Communication was an important part of a ritual. During the rituals, people needed to present their respect and awe, wishes and demands, gratitude and plea, to the supernatural powers. There were many ways to send these messages to them: praying, crying, chanting, dancing, kowtowing, gesturing, burning incense or playing music. Once the objects of communication evolved into a huge and complicated bureaucratic system, formal written documents were created to guarantee that messages are sent to the right place and reach to the right deities. At the same time, these documents also outlined the overall hierarchy and made the invisible supernatural powers sensible. On the one hand, the “documentary administration” of a secular bureaucratic system was brought into ritual practices and shaped the image of divine bureaucracy. On the other hand, when the ritual practices of communicative texts became formalized and widely spread, this idea of bureaucracy and hierarchical power structure also reached local communities, including the marginal communities where the state power might not fully penetrate. The mutual construction of supernatural and secular orders can be seen in the use of communicative texts in rituals.

Performative Texts

In addition to communication, texts were also made to be performed. The second category is those performed during rituals as a part of the ritual procedures. These texts were performed in different ways. They were the scriptures that specialists recited, the

²⁴ *Zajian shushi* 雜件疏式.

spells that specialists chanted, the magic characters that specialists wrote in the air, and the talismans that specialists wrote on a paper strip and burnt. Compared to bureaucratic documents, most of these texts originated from a specific tradition. They are usually the key that specialists or scholars use to identify the religious tradition of a ritual.

Many rituals were divided into several “sections,” (*ke* 科) and each section had its specific texts to be performed. For example, during the Shangyuan, a two-day ceremony was held in Longtan village to celebrate the birthday of the Lady of Linshui. This ceremony was divided into four sections. The first section, “Descending from the Horses and Making the Announcement” (*xiamafazou* 下馬發奏), was to announce the beginning of the ceremony, and summon various heavenly soldiers, envoys of Heavenly Bureau, and tutelary deities to prepare for the ceremony. Since opening the connection between the human world and the supernatural world could be dangerous, the heavenly soldiers would be particularly summoned to kill the evil spirits and purify the ritual space. In the second section, “Reporting to the Masters and Establishing the Altar,” (*bingshi jiantan* 稟師建壇) an altar was established to invite all the masters. In most cases, the altar was established for inviting deities, but since the ritual specialist regarded himself as the disciple of the Lady of Linshui, the early master of Lüshan tradition, he also invited his masters. During this section, a long series of masters was invited and worshiped by reciting their titles and names, from the very early “Master of Teaching” (*jiaozhu* 教主), the Lady of Linshui and her parents and siblings, to the specialist’s own deceased teachers, as well as tutelary deities and the villagers’ ancestors. During this section, a written *shu* was also recited and burnt to them. The third section, “the Banquet for the Lady” (*furen jiao* 夫人醮), food and wine provided

by villagers were offered to the Lady of Linshui and other masters and deities, and a verse to praise the Lady of Linshui was recited. In the last section, “Great Gratitude” (*daixie* 代謝), the specialist, representing the villagers, showed the gratitude to all these masters and deities, and farewell to send them back to the heaven. The wishes of the villagers would be chanted again at the end of this section.²⁵

Each section had at least one manual recording all the texts that had to be performed in the section. These sections were mainly a combination of several scriptures, verses and incantations, and other texts. For example, in the beginning of the first section, after performing “dispersing the pollution” (*pohui* 破穢) the specialist had to write several sets of magic characters in the air. Some of these characters would be invented under the esoteric tradition and could not be read. The talismans needed in the section were also copied in the manual. These manuals not only recorded the scriptures, verses and incantations that the specialist had to chant and recite in the section, but also noted when and which verse should be recited, what action should be taken by the specialist, such as ringing the bell, treading special steps, or splashing the holy water. The manuals also noted that at what point the specialist should recite or burn the prepared communicative texts. To some extent, these section manuals, or *keyiben* 科儀本, were the scripts for the specialist to perform each section of the ritual, and the key that made rituals precisely repeated each time. These complicated scriptures or incantations could only be accurately chanted after being written. The unreadable magic characters or talismans could only be accurately reproduced with written samples. Presumably, ritual specialists had to strictly follow the manuals and perform

²⁵ *Shanyuan xiamagong ke ji daxie* 上元下馬供科及大謝, *Bingshi daxie ke* 稟師大謝科, and *Furen jiao ke* 夫人醮科. The previous specialist wrote the order of each section and the day that each section should be performed on the covers of these three manuals.

these texts one after another. The rigidity of ritual performance, together with the esoteric or religious appearance of these texts, fortified the authority of rituals.

Less “religious” rituals might not have these liturgical sections, but performing texts was still an important procedure. For example, a booklet collected in Longtan has the title *Formularies of Sacrificial Texts* (*jiwen jianshi* 祭文檢式). According to the signature, this handwritten booklet was compiled in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ It collects the exemplars of various sacrificial texts used on different occasions, beginning with ten exemplars of sacrificial texts to ancestors in the ritual of ancestral worship at the day of Qingming 清明. Many of these texts were used at funerals. These texts were classified by the relationships between the dead and the presenter, such as the sacrificial text to parents, to foster parents, to grandparents, to parents-in-law, to uncles and others. Others included the sacrificial texts to Confucius, to the Lady of Linshui in Shangyuan, to the Master of Precinct etc. These sacrificial texts, in the form of essays or verses, were supposed to be written on paper, recited and burned during these different sacrificial ceremonies. Sometimes a note would be use to indicate when the text should be presented, such as “using while the body is put into the coffin,” “while offering the wine in front of the coffin,” or “during the ceremony of ancestral worship at the eve of Zhongyuan.”²⁷ While different sacrificial ceremonies had different sacrificial texts to be performed, this booklet provided comprehensive exemplars for the host of ceremony to follow.

²⁶ The signature on the cover belongs to a person living in the nineteenth century, and several exemplars of the sacrificial texts begin with the reign title, Xianfeng (1851-1861). See “Qingming ji tudi wen 清明祭土地文,” *Jiwen jianshi*, 5.

²⁷ *Jiwen jianshi*, 9 and 16.

Instead of being read or listened to by the audience, the primary attribute of these ritual texts is to be seen or be heard, or more precisely, to be performed. Even those “petitions” and “memorials” were not to be read or communicate with by any human beings, but rather they were a part of the performance in rituals. Not only the audio and visual representation of these texts was necessary, but also the actions of “making texts” were the essential part of the performance. Although many texts, especially those complicated petitions or memorials, were prepared before rituals, specialists usually filled in the names or stamped the paper during the rituals to make their “action of producing texts” explicit. It is also very common for specialists to hold the manuals while reciting the written texts, even though they might have remembered the content after repeatedly performing the same ritual (Figure 25). As Kristofer Schipper’s observation: “the entire ritual is written. The manuscript of the text of the ceremony has to be present, open on the altar, when the ritual is performed.”²⁸ Burning the papers of written texts was also an important performance. From the beginning to the end, the procedure of “presenting the texts” had to be remarkable in a ritual.

²⁸ Kristopher Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 45.1(1985.11): 34. For the “ritual of writing,” also see Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: the Imperial Metaphor* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 204-197



Figure 25 Shaman reciting documents in a ritual (Jixia)

Sometimes the written texts themselves did not even have to be “visible” or “audible.” The best example is the performance of “writing invisible characters in the air,” in which the magic characters were unseen, but the action of writing became a significant performance in the ritual. A parallel performance is “reciting unheard incantation,” in which the specialist recited the incantation voiceless and covered up his mouth with sleeves. Although these silent incantations were recorded in the manuals and the specialist was supposed to recite them word by word, only the recitation of secret incantations was performed in the rituals and no one – except for the deities – could actually hear the content. In both cases, the open actions of making texts and the actions of openly making texts secret were both a part of the ritual performance.²⁹

These cases show that reading is not the only way to make the texts meaningful. The performativity of ritual texts suggests multiple ways for texts to be perceived. Not only the action of producing texts, but also the action of producing invisible characters and voiceless speeches created meanings in the ritual. These textual performances

²⁹ As for these “interior ritual” and “secret formula,” also see *ibid.*

provided the formality which makes rituals repeatable. By performing these supposedly unchanging texts inherited from previous masters, the rituals produced a sense of continuity attached to certain traditions, which endorsed the legitimacy of rituals.

Declarative Texts

The third category of ritual texts is those being preserved and displayed after rituals to maintain the effects of rituals. These texts, such as the talismans and magic characters after the ritual of completing a new building, or the seals on children's clothes after the ritual of cross-the-passes, were produced during the ritual, kept by the participants and often openly displayed afterwards. The effects of ritual instilled by the ritual specialists were supposed to be kept by these texts and brought into participants' normal life. While there were many different forms of these texts around the villages, a very prevalent case in Pingnan was so-called "divine placard," (*shenbang* 神榜) a red paper written with the names of deities and posted on the hall of almost every family (Figure 26). This divine placard was written by a ritual specialist under a specific ritual, and represented the deities that this family worshipped. When the family offered the incenses or sacrifices, they offered to all the deities whose names were on the paper.



Figure 26 Divine Placard (*Shenbang*) (Jixia)

The deities' names were always placed in a particular order. The central one was the most important deity that this family worshipped. The second important one was the one in center right; the third, center left; the fourth, the second right to the center. Following this order, the least one that this family worshipped was in the far left side of the paper, and the second least one was in the far right of the paper. The numbers of deities in the placard were different, from eleven to twenty-one. This hierarchical order is very strict, and according to different villages, different families, and even different ritual specialists, the compositions of deities varied. The center one was usually the nation-wide deity with high popularity, such as *Guanyin*, *Guandi* 關帝, or the Mysterious Heavenly Upper Emperor. These are the deities which have been incorporated into the Daoist pantheon, and have a concrete position in higher religious traditions. Following the central one were several regional deities that protect the Precinct and the village, such as the Great Sage Equal to the Heaven or the Lady of Linshui. The deities of the principle and minor temples in the village were included in

these positions. The lowest one was always the ancestors, which were always right below the house deities of stove or incense, the tutelary deities, and the masters of ritual specialists. The system and the hierarchical order of deities that a family worshiped cannot be clearer as manifested on this placard. The hierarchy of these deities was the consequence of a longtime integration between local beliefs and mainstream religions. It was displayed on the placard and openly announced to villagers. With the deities' names written by a ritual specialist, this red paper could replace several statues and tablets, and represent all deities that villagers worshiped. These written names were themselves a symbol of divine order which was generated through a ritual. Although statues and drawings were sometimes used as the symbols too, the prevalent written placards in Pingnan indicate the higher authority of texts.

Similar to stone inscriptions or wooden plaques, these written names, talismans and seals were not to be read, but to be displayed as a symbol of order: the imaginary characters on talismans were even unreadable. To some degree, these divine placards and other displayed ritual texts had similar significance to the stone inscriptions and carved wooden plaques described in Chapter 5. While the authority of stone inscriptions or wooden plaques in public places came from secular institutional powers, such as the state or major local lineages, these divine placards and other texts gained their authority from religious or supernatural sources. While the stone inscriptions and other public texts were produced during an event, the divine placard and other declarative ritual texts were produced during a ritual. Both of them attempted to maintain the consequence of a peculiar moment, announce it openly, and make it a convention accepted by a particular group of people. They were the statements of established order, supported by the authority and represented by written texts.

These three categories of ritual texts show that, even though these villages were far from political or culture cores, the rituals in Pingnan were highly textualized. The ritual performance was highly integrated with written texts in different aspects. First, the communicative texts introduced the logics of bureaucratic institutions into the ritualistic realm. By using these texts in the rituals, on the one hand, the hierarchical structure of secular powers was imposed upon the unruly natural and supernatural world. Thus, the massive and elusive world of deities and ghosts became expectable and communicable.³⁰ On the other hand, the secular orders, such as the relationships between governing and being governed, were also confirmed during the practices of rituals, even though the state power was relatively remote. Second, not only did the content and the format of texts matter, but also “practicing texts” itself became a performance within the rituals. Many sections of ritual were composed of the acts of chanting or writing specific texts. The procedures of rituals were primarily moving from practicing one text to another. These texts – scriptures, talismans and magical characters – became the primary components of the ritual and its link to a cultural tradition. Third, similar to the texts displayed in public, the effect of ritual also persisted through the exhibition of written texts. These texts were made during the rituals but preserved and displayed openly afterwards. While public texts – stone inscriptions,

³⁰ One of the main arguments in the collected essays, *Unruly God*, is to demonstrate that not all the deities are included in the bureaucratic model. See Shahar and Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*. However, we can also say that the attempt to apply bureaucratic model and use these documents is to regulate the inconceivable and unruly natural and supernatural powers. Of course there are unruly deities, just as there are always unruly subjects in the secular regime. Moreover, while scholars who follow “the bureaucratic model” might believe that this model of secular world was applied to the spiritual world, it could also work in the other way: it was these ritual orders that created ancestors and deities that made people articulate this fragmented world. See Michael Puett, “Economies of Ghosts, Gods, and Goods: The History and Anthropology of Chinese Temple Networks,” in M. M. J. Fischer et al. eds., *Radical Egalitarianism: Local Realities, Global Relations* (New York: Fordham University Press: 2013), 91-100

stone arches and wooden plaques – turned local events into structures (Chapter 5), these declarative texts after rituals also turned the intermediate condition of ritual into a constant state.

However, all these three aspects of textualized ritual should not be taken for granted. The textualization of ritualistic realm was a historical formation, and so were these links between ritual texts and these features of rituals. Moreover, not all the communities in China accepted these textualized rituals at the same time or under the same historical circumstances. It is therefore necessary to inspect how these ritual texts entered a community case by case.

The Collection and Transmission of Ritual Texts

Syncretism in the Early Eighteenth Century and Before

The oldest ritual texts in Chen Daoxian's collection were six section manuals copied by Wu Daoxuan 吳道玄 in 1716 and 1721 (Chart 9). It is usually difficult to date manuscripts, but Wu Daoxuan (whose secular name was Wu Bican 吳碧燦) left postscripts at the end of several manuscripts he copied, such as "In the sixth month of the fifty-fifth year in the Kangxi reign (1716), the maternal grandfather Wu Daoxuan collected and copied the complete manual for the sections of 'Crossing the Passes' (*ranguan* 襁關) and 'Great Gratitude,' and gave it to the grandson Pan Dehuai 潘德懷 to learn and read." (Figure 27)³¹ In the end of another manuscript he copied five years later, he wrote: "In the fourth month of the sixty year in the Kangxi reign (1721), Wu Daoxuan of the thirty-second *du* collected and copied the manual for the section of

³¹ *Ranguan daxie* 襁關大謝, 84.

‘Sending off the Buddha’ (*songfo* 送佛), totally in one volume written in the style of Tang calligraphy. I gave it to the disciples, Xie Yuanfu 謝元福 and [Xie] Yuanzhao 元召. They should follow my strokes, learn the calligraphy diligently, and do not neglect [this work].³²” Among these six manuscripts, except for the first one, which was a formulary for documents used on different occasions, the rest of them were ritual manuals of different sections.

Chart 9 Manuscripts Copied by Wu Daoxun

| Date | Title | Recipient(s) |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| 2 nd month, KS 55 th year | 各件公檢 General Formulary of Assorted Document | n.a. |
| 6 th month, KS 55 th year | 襁關大謝 Crossing the Passes and Presenting Gratitude | Grandson Pan Dehuai |
| 1 st month, KS 60 th year | 襁關科 Crossing the Passes | Xie Yuanfu |
| 3 rd month, KS 60 th year | 建壇科範/大建壇 Establishing the Grand Altar | Xie Yuanfu & Xie Yuanzhao |
| 4 th month, KS 60 th year | 請供王科 Pleading and Offering to the Kings | Xie Yuanfu & Xie Yuanzhao |
| 4 th month, KS 60 th year | 金山送佛 Sending off the Buddha, Golden Mountain Sect | Xie Yuanfu & Xie Yuanzhao |

³² *Jinshan songfu* 金山送佛, 18.

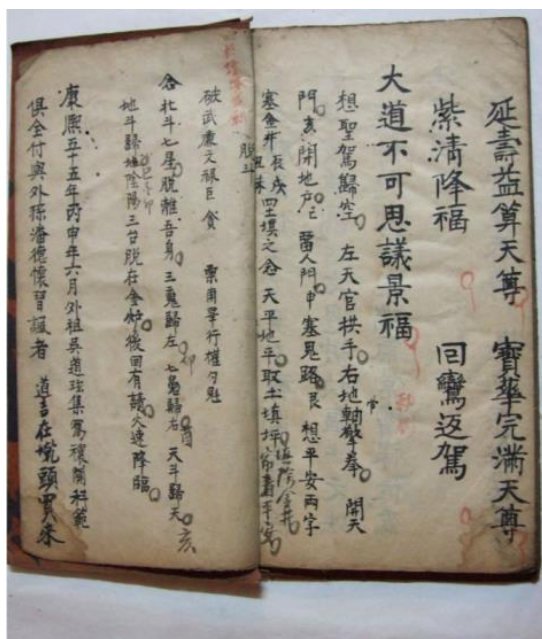


Figure 27 Postscript in the ritual manual, “Crossing the Passes and Presenting Gratitude”

Although the information provided by Wu Daoxuan’s manuscripts is very limited, it is fair to say that at least in the early eighteenth century, this ritual specialist in Pingnan was highly literate and able to manage different kinds of ritual texts. His six surviving manuscripts are very diverse, belonging to at least two different ritual traditions. Two manuals, “Sending off the Buddha” and “Establishing the Grand Altar,” were sections in the Yulan 盂蘭 ceremony. This Buddhist ceremony was performed during the Zhongyuan ghost festival, feeding hungry ghosts and saving the souls of ones’ deceased parents from the purgatory.³³ The manual, “Sending off the Buddha,” has been particularly identified as following the tradition of the Golden Mountain Sect (*jinshan jiao* 金山教), a sect of lay Buddhism. In these two manuals, only Buddha and Bodhisattva were summoned, and several transliterated Buddhist sutras were recited during the ritual. In addition to these two lay Buddhist manuals, *General Formulary* is a

³³ Stephen T. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

collection of ritual documents used on several occasions, and according to their languages, they also followed the lay Buddhist tradition.

Another manual, “Pleading and Offering to the Kings,” was used for offering the sacrifice to the Kings of the underworld in the ceremony of “Filing Money” (*tianqian* 填錢). The purpose of this ceremony was donating money to the underworld and saving the deceased parents from the tortures. This ceremony shared similar ideas with the Yulan ceremony, but was performed after ones’ parents’ funerals. The manual apparently was under the influence from Daoism and other local cults. Both Buddhist and Daoist deities would be invited, as well as regional and local deities, such as the Lady of Linshui. The specialist’s past masters were also invited to enhance the power of the specialist. Apparently the tradition that this ritual manual followed was close to that of Lüshan, but with many Buddhist and Daoist elements.

The other two manuals were for the ritual of cross-the-passes. This popular ritual was performed for children and young adults, ordering heavenly soldiers to kill evil spirits that were haunting them and helping them going through numerous “passes” they would encounter. These manuals summoned the Lady of Linshui and used her power to order divine soldiers. “Cross-the-passes” was an important ritual to Lüshan tradition. Both two belonged to this tradition, a mixture of the Daoist elements and local cults that emphasized the power to eliminate evil spirits.³⁴ Only the deities in the Lüshan tradition were mentioned in these two manuals.

Although only six manuscripts survived, the remarkable diversity of these manuscripts suggests that during the period of Wu Daoxuan, he had been able to manage the ritual texts from different traditions and did not confine himself to a single

³⁴ Also see Bridette Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, especially the Eighth Chapter.

religious tradition. Ranging from lay Buddhism, mixture of Buddhism, Daoism and local cults, to the purely local Lüshan tradition, these texts show not only the feature of syncretism in local rituals, but also the eclecticism of ritual specialists. The fact that all these surviving texts are only associated with one or two sections of a ceremony suggests that Wu Daoxuan had much more texts in his collection during his time, and could handle several ceremonies of different ritual traditions.

This rich and syncretic textual tradition certainly did not start from the early eighteenth century. In northeastern Fujian, syncretism of ritual practices started from the late Song dynasty and peaked in the late Ming. In the early middle period, Buddhist monasteries were the principal power in local society in northeastern Fujian. Buddhist monasteries not only owned many estates and dominated the economic realm, but also dominated the realm of communal rituals. Most communal rituals, especially many rituals related to deceased parents or ancestors, were led by Buddhist monks and held in the Buddhist monasteries, and rich families donated money to monasteries to have an ancestral tablet put in the monasteries.³⁵ The power of Buddhist monasteries started to decline during the late Song, and further weakened during the Ming, after many of their estates were confiscated and turned into military fields at the beginning of the Ming.³⁶

Meanwhile, the state extensively granted titles to local deities during the Song period, and from the Song to the Ming, many local deities were promoted to regional

³⁵ For example, the genealogy of the Zheyang Zhangs mentions that the ritual to worship their ancestors was practiced in a Buddhist monastery near their ancestral graves during the Song. See *Zheyang Zhang-shi zupu*, 51.

³⁶ There are many explanations for the decline of Buddhism in the late Song. One of the reasons is that these rich monasteries became the target for both the state and the bandits. Among many achievements of the legendary Gutian magistrate Li Kan in his story of “civilizing Gutian,” an important one was to confiscate the estates of Buddhist monasteries and lowered the numbers of monks. While Buddhist monasteries became the target as the state attempted to extend its power, once the authority of the state declined, these monasteries also became the target of “bandits” for their abundant properties. For the development of Buddhism in Fujian during this period, also see Chikusa Masaaki, “Fukken no jiu to shakai.”

deities and the protectors of local communities.³⁷ Among these deities, many were venerable shamans, spirit mediums and exorcists when they were alive. The rise of the Lady of Linshui is the best example. At the beginning, the image of the Lady of Linshui was a female shaman in Gutian. Her early stories before the Ming were always related to saving pregnant women from the attack of demonic creatures (mostly a snake) and protecting children and mothers. She was granted a title by the state during the late Song, and a Yuan inscription to her renovated temple in Gutian shows her rising status in her native place. Since the middle Ming, instead of a shaman, she was presented as a deity who killed the demonic snake for the community, and became the protector of local people. The records in local gazetteers indicate that her temples were established in many counties in northern and northeastern Fujian, and several stories were created in these counties to localize her status, turning her from an outside shaman to a local deity.³⁸ Her legends in different periods illustrate her transformation from a local shaman with a specialty to a regional and general deity.

Buddhist monasteries were usually away from villages, but temples of local deities were usually within the boundaries of a village and close to villagers' daily life. This trend of localizing deities came together with the rise of localized ritual specialists

³⁷ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276*. For the general account on the transformation of religious culture during the Song, also see Richard von Glahn, "The Song Transformation of Chinese Religious Culture," *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 130-179.

³⁸ For example, the gazetteer of Luoyuan 羅源 County compiled in 1545 claimed she was married to a local person in Luoyuan and lived in this county. Her temple in Luoyuan was situated in her husband's village. This story was to explain why an outside female deity was worshipped in our place, and a convenient explanation was to make her marry to local person and became "local." In other counties, she became the daughter of local people, or the younger sister of other popular local deities. The stories around Fuzhou claimed her parents came from Fuzhou and made Fuzhou her hometown. In the coastal counties where the belief of Mazu was popular, the Lady of Linshui became the young sister of Mazu. See *Luoyuan xianzhi* 羅源縣志, 13/19, Huang Zhongzhao 黃仲昭, *Bamin tongzhi* 八閩通志 (Fuzhou: Fujian remin, 2006), 515 and Gao Cheng 高澄, "Linshui furen ji 臨水夫人記," *Shi Liuqiu lu sanzong* 使琉球錄三種 (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1970), 102-103.

and the syncretization of rituals. Following the decline of Buddhist monasteries and Buddhist monks, many communal rituals were handed to Daoist masters or specialists of local cults from the Song to the Ming. A local proverb vividly describes this change: “Daoist masters took the rice bowl of Buddhist monks. 道士搶了和尚飯。” The roles of Daoist masters and specialists of local cults were relatively marginal during the early middle period, but since they started to play a central role in the communal rituals of local communities after the retreat of monastic Buddhist monks, they had to expand their repertoire. The easiest way for both Daoist masters and specialists of local cults was to adopt the frameworks, concepts and even languages from existing traditions, especially those of Buddhism, and create their own version. Many lay Buddhist ceremonies, such as Yulan ceremony and the ceremony of Blood Basin (*xie pen* 血盆), were therefore transformed into the Daoist ones. Moreover, local cults, such as Lüshan, learned from Buddhism and Daoism and created their new cults. Some localized Buddhist priests also absorbed elements from Daoism and local cults, and were difficult to be distinguished from other ritual specialists. Many might still keep the Buddhist label, such as Shi Sect 釋教 (or the Sect of Shakyamuni)³⁹ or “fragrant-flower monks (香花和尚 *xianghua heshang*)” but they no longer lived in monasteries and therefore became local ritual specialists. Most of these specialists lived in villages, and served local people.

The formation of Lüshan tradition is also an example of this creation. Lüshan tradition is a popular ritual tradition in Fujian and south China. It is usually regarded as a sect of Daoism but its apparent features of shamanic cults, such as using a horn as its

³⁹ The character, “*shi*,” here came from the transliterated name of Shakyamuni, but in this context, it simply means “Buddhist,” although this sect developed their own ritual system different from that of Buddhism.

cult device or wearing a crown and a skirt during rituals make it distinguishable from mainstream Daoist traditions. The formation of Lüshan tradition went together with the transformation of the Lady of Linshui's image during the late Ming. The original image of the Lady of Linshui before the early Ming was a shaman or an exorcist who dispelled evil spirits and killed demonic creatures. She was commonly worshipped by the specialists of local cults in northeastern Fujian as the masters they summoned in the rituals. During the late Ming, as she became a dominant deity protecting local communities in northeastern Fujian, she was also regarded as the principle masters of the newly labelled Lüshan tradition. New stories during the late Ming made her become a younger sister of a famous Daoist master during the Five Dynasties who went to Lüshan to learn Daoist cults, such as drawing talismans and mysterious characters and performing the Method of Five Thunders (*wulei fa* 五雷法). After learning these Daoist methods, she killed a giant monstrous snake for the emperor of the Min Kingdom and the emperor established a shrine for her.⁴⁰ In these stories with apparent Daoist terms and plots, she was integrated into the Daoist system and became the founder of a distinguished local tradition. As the primary regional deity in northeastern Fujian from a local shaman, she also became the principle masters of Lüshan tradition from a specialist of local cults. Although being placed into Daoist system, she still kept her shamanic features in several aspects. How her image was presented shows this duality. Her statue in temples is often a benevolent motherly woman wearing a decorated robe, a typical image of a female deity-official in Daoist divine bureaucracy, but her image of the little statue that ritual specialists use as a ritual device is a female

⁴⁰ Moreover, from killing the snake for local pregnant women to killing the snake for the emperor of the Ming Kingdom (in some versions, the emperor's concubine), the story also shows the change of her status. No longer a wandering local exorcist, in these stories mostly from the provincial capital, she served the state and her temple was also established by the state.

warrior holding a sword and a horn with a clown on her head, standing one-foot on a magical wheel, a vivid image of an exorcist.⁴¹

To change their role from “ghostbusters” to the leaders of communal rituals, specialists of local cults learned much from the Daoist masters, who previously absorbed Buddhist elements in their rituals. Therefore, the rituals labelled as Lüshan tradition were very close to the Daoist ones in many aspects and usually classified as a Daoist variation by scholars. The basic structure of Lüshan ceremonies shown in these ritual manuals was particular similar to that of Daoism, from establishing the altar, sending the correspondence via heavenly messengers, inviting the deities and heavenly soldiers, submitting the plea or other documents, to showing the gratitude and sending back the deities. By absorbing the ritual texts of Daoist liturgy, specialists of Lüshan tradition adopted these “sections” recorded in ritual manuals and established similar ceremonies. During this process of appropriation, local ritual specialists learned the Daoist concept of “divine bureaucracy” and documents to communicate with deities and ghosts. They learned the ways to “perform texts” during the rituals, such as writing Daoist talismans or chanting Buddhist verses. They also placed their deities (of course the Lady of the Linshui was one of them) into the hierarchy of Daoist deities and wrote their name on the red divine placard. So-called syncretism in Chinese religions was largely presented by the appropriation of ritual texts.

⁴¹ Li Ren-Yuan, “Cong Mingdai shiliao kan Linshui furen xinyang de zaoqi fazhang,” 1-12. The most comprehensive study of the Lady of Linshui in English is Brigitte Baptandier’s *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, which is translated from French. See Brigitte Baptandier, translated by Kristin Fryklund, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, and also Brigitte Baptandier, “The Lady Linshui: How a Women Became a Goddess,” in *Unruly God*, 105-149. However, her analysis of the Lady of Linshui heavily relies on the stories spread during the late Ming and the Qing, especially a nineteenth-century novel of her adventure, without considering her changing status from the Song to the Qing.

The long syncretic tendency from the late Song to the Ming can be observed from the mixed elements in Wu Daoxuan's texts. The spread of the Daoist images of the Lady of Linshui in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries can be taken as a sign of the rise of Lüshan tradition – a set of local shamanic cults in the shape of Daoist liturgy. This tradition was well presented in Wu Daoxuan's written copies in the early eighteenth century. Three of the six copies can be classified as Lüshan tradition. Three other texts had more Buddhist features, such as the names of Buddha or the transliterated Buddhist sutras, but were also greatly influenced by the Daoist tradition and shared similar structure with the Daoist liturgy. Instead of being performed by Buddhist monks, the three Buddhist ritual manuals copied by Wu Daoxuan were performed by lay ritual specialists, who identified these rituals as “Shi Sect.”⁴²

These two ritual traditions – Lüshan and Shi Sect – are themselves the integration of different elements. Lüshan is the mixture of local cults and Daoist liturgy, and Shi Sect is Buddhist contents by Daoist format. However, it seems no problem at all for Wu Daoxuan to switch from one tradition to another, and copy texts of both traditions to his disciples. To differentiate one tradition from another, scholars often study the features of selected traditions and assume clear boundaries among them, from the contents of rituals to their performers. This differentiation did not seem clear to Wu Daoxuan and his successors. Wu Daoxuan's copies suggest that there was not only syncretism in ritual traditions, but also eclecticism among ritual specialists. A modern ritual specialist, Chen Daoxian, told me that because there is the need for different kinds of rituals, they have to be able to perform rituals in different traditions. This tendency of crossing the

⁴² Also see Song Yonghe 宋永和, “Mindong diqu shijiao de xingcheng yu yishi xingtai zhi yanjiu 閩東地區釋教的形成與儀式型態之研究.” M.A. Thesis. Department of Religious Studies, Fujian Normal University, 2011.

boundaries did not begin from today's Chen Daoxian; Wu Daoxuan's copies in the early seventeenth century had shown this flexibility.

Expansion in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The few postscripts left by Wu Daoxuan also imply the professionalism of ritual specialists. He stressed literary skills and diligent attitudes to the disciples whom he transmitted the texts. Judging by the calligraphy, Wu Daoxuan was skilled in hand-writing himself, and at least could differentiate the styles of calligraphy ("written in the style of Tang calligraphy"). Besides having the skills himself, he also required his disciples to learn writing by following his strokes too ("They should follow my strokes, learn the calligraphy diligently"). In another postscript at the end of *General Formulary*, since the receiver was not specified, he asked anyone who learned it should not neglect the importance of it.⁴³ These ending remarks suggest that written texts had become an inseparable part of ritual performance, and to succeed in the position of a ritual specialist, the ability to manipulate written texts was the most important quality. While it took much time to learn these skills, in order to pass on these skills selecting a good disciple and making him stay around to learn these skills is necessary. The most reasonable pick was usually someone in the family or in the same lineage.

We do not know Wu Daoxuan's relationship to Xie Yuanfu and Xie Yuanzhao, but he chose his grandson Pan Dehuai to receive his texts. In many rituals, the specialist would summon his masters from his immediate teacher to the founder of the tradition to enhance his own power. This master-disciple relationship provided authority to prove that his rituals and all these ritual texts abided by a long tradition. Because of this emphasis of master-disciple relationships, many ritual specialists kept the successive

⁴³ *Geshi gongjian* 各式公檢.

records of the names of their masters. In some cases, these names were written in the ritual manuals so that the ritual specialists could recite them for the rituals. For example, a ritual specialist in Qiantou 乾頭 listed twenty-three names of his masters in succession behind a tablet as his ritual device. Although these records provided a long genealogy of ritual tradition, these names, which were all “religious names,” had little hint to their lives and temporal background, and hence could not be used to reconstruct the history of succession.

For Chen Daoxian, he apparently inherited this job and his ritual texts from the family members. Although I did not find any list of his masters, fortunately several names of them could be found on his ritual texts. Some of these names could be identified through genealogical records and written materials. The earliest name of the Chen family found in Chen Daoxian’s collection is on the written copy of a multi-volume (six survive) lay Buddhist manual for the Grand Longhua Ceremony (龍華盛會). This copy of *Newly Collected Formularies for the Grand Ceremony of Longhua* 新集龍華盛會文檢 was made in 1751, and the name, Chen Daocheng 陳道成, was written at different places in this manuscript. Chen Daocheng called himself “the disciple of Buddha” (*fodizi* 佛弟子), and showed a very respectful attitude in copying this set of texts.⁴⁴ Compared to later manuscripts, this collection was copied in very good quality. Although it was a hand-copied manual, it imitated the format of book with a general table of content in the very first volume, and a table of content for each volume. Every page has a borderline like a book, and the copyist wrote down his

⁴⁴ He used the expressions of “hand washed” (*guanshou* 盥手) and “perfumed and bathed” (*xunmu* 薰沐) in his signature, implying he cleaned himself before writing, which is an expression to show the serious and most respectful attitude.

name under the title lines and at the end line of each volume, which was also usually seen in a book. The source of Chen Daochen's copy is unknown, but it is fair to say as early as in the mid-eighteenth century, the ritual specialist in Longtan had already been able to manage such complicated work of textual reproduction, and took it very seriously.

From the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the ritual specialists in Longtan collected ritual manuscripts from many different sources. One section manual for the ceremony performed in Zhongyuan was copied in 1758 by a ritual specialist in Gutian. In the postscript, the Gutian specialist said he was open to sharing his books with people outside his altar, as he shared his money and food with others. He did not reveal his recipient, but this manual ended up in the Chen family's possession.⁴⁵ In 1763, Chen Daocong 陳道聰, another ritual specialist in Longtan Chen family, received at least three ritual manuals copied by Zeng Haoquan 曾浩泉, who claimed to come from Fuzhou. In one copy of them, Zeng Haoquan said he copied these manuals section by section, and gave them to Chen Daocong to teach his disciples.⁴⁶ In 1826, a manual for the ritual to "opening five directions" in the underworld was copied from a temple.⁴⁷ It seems that even though ritual manuals are usually taken as "secrets," in fact there were many occasions for a ritual specialist to obtain the copies from others. These copies from Fuzhou and Gutian imply a period that the ritual specialists in Longtan eagerly collected ritual texts outside Pingnan to enrich their libraries, as well as their ability to perform complicated rituals.

⁴⁵ *Shishi ke* 施食科.

⁴⁶ *Qingwang kefang* 請王科範, *Sixian keyi* 祀先科儀, *Wandaochang kedian* 晚道場科典.

⁴⁷ *Kaifang ke* 開方科.

However, it was during the period of Chen Daochang 陳道昌 and his nephew, Chen Daoji, that their collection rapidly grew. Chen Daochang was a keen copyist and collector. At least nine manuals in this collection have his name on it, including two copied in the 1820s acquired by him from neighboring villages, and another two were copied by himself during the 1880s. Moreover, from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, there were at least six names of ritual specialist on the ritual manuals, but only in the late nineteenth century when Chen Daochang became the leader, the name of their altar, Jingfu Altar 景福壇 (literally “the Altar of Grand Blessing”), started to appear on the cover of their manuals.⁴⁸ In the tradition of Daoism and popular religion, the name of “altar” (壇 *tan*) is used to label a group of successive ritual specialists who learn from their masters and transmit their skill and knowledge to their disciples. This group of specialists shares this altar generation by generation, and uses the name of altar to identify themselves. The appearance of the name of altar suggests that instead of individual specialists, they labelled themselves as a successive and professional group.

Comparing to diligent Chen Daochang, his successor and his nephew, Chen Daoji, was even more productive. Among ninety of this manual collection, seventy-one had a signature on it so we know under whose hands this manual was acquired. Among seventy-one with a signature, thirty-seven were collected or copied by Chen Daoji. He bought the six manuals copied by Wu Daoxuan in 1716 and 1721 from Qiantou, which is a single-surname village of the Xie and probably the hometown of Wu Daoxuan’s disciples, Xie Yuanfu and Xie Yuanzhao. He also copied many manuals: among thirty-seven with his signature, at least twenty-three were certainly copied by him.

⁴⁸ *Zhaoling kefang* 召靈科範.

Even in his seventies in 1922, two years before he passed away, he still went to a temple to copy a ritual manual.⁴⁹

No doubt that Chen Daoji's efforts greatly expanded the collection of Jingfu Altar. He copied ritual manuals from different traditions. While the ritual manuals in the collection had more from the lay Buddhist (or Shi Sect) tradition before the mid-nineteenth century, he collected and copied more from the Lüshan and other traditions so that he and his disciples could perform on more occasions. The lay Buddhist tradition in Pingnan was important in performing the Zhongyuan ceremony for the ancestors, but the tradition of the Lüshan was particularly strong in the ritual of "cross-the-passes" and other rituals of dispelling evil spirits. With his expansion, his altar could better serve the need of the village.

The growth of Chen Daoxian's collection shows that during the mid-eighteenth century the ritual specialists in Longtan had already copied high-quality ritual texts, but a great leap was in the late nineteenth century. The early texts copied by the specialists in Longtan were very formal with better calligraphy, but the texts during Chen Daochang and Chen Daoji's period, despite a leap in quantity, were lower in quality. Many copies by them and their disciples were messy, and it was very common to use the extra spaces of papers for unrelated contents. Sometimes unrelated contents of different rituals were copied together in the same manual. It might not mean the literary level of Chen Daoji and his disciples was lower than his predecessors in the eighteenth century, but it indicates that there were more texts for them to manage. Because texts were not as rare as before, not every text was so carefully copied and preserved. The degrading quantity and escalating quantity of these manuscripts indicate that as more

⁴⁹ *Daode jing* 道德經.

written texts were accumulated, copying and collecting texts became an ordinary activity.

People often imagine that ritual texts are secretly kept by ritual specialists, who rarely shared their knowledge as well as textual sources with outsiders. The case of Chen Daoxian's collection reveals that the exchanges of manuscripts were active and frequent for a long while. They not only inherited the texts from his masters, but also collected the texts from multiple outside sources. These texts were not simply transmitted from one generation to the next one; the ritual specialists might also collect many other texts to fit their current need. The growing diversity and quantity of the ritual texts they collected suggest the different roles of ritual specialists in Longtan. On the one hand, they relied more on texts; on the other hands, because of the authority provided by these texts, they were able to perform more rituals that the villagers required in their daily life. This change might result from not only the ritual specialists' personality and diligence, but a general cultural and social change in Pingnan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when more texts were circulated and widely used in different aspects of daily life.

The Chen's collection also suggests the rise of localized ritual specialists in villages. Not all communities had their own ritual specialists at the very beginning. Smaller villages without ritual specialists needed to invite ritual specialists from outside to perform certain rituals for them. According to the signatures on ritual manuals, the first record of ritual specialists in Longtan was in the mid-eighteenth century, and in the mid-nineteenth century, a more organized and successive "altar" appeared to serve the village. In the late nineteenth century, another "altar" was established in Longtan. This group of ritual specialists belonged to another lineage

branch, and learned about their ritual traditions from an affinal relative, who was a ritual specialist in a neighboring village. From the late nineteenth century to the Communist Revolutions, these two groups of ritual specialists served their own branches for most minor rituals, but the two altars took turns to perform communal rituals for the whole village, such as the ritual of worship to the Lady of Linshui in Shangyuan. As for a few grand ceremonies, such as the ceremony for rainmaking or the formal Yulan ceremony in Zhongyuan, these two groups of specialists worked together.⁵⁰ From individual ritual specialists to groups attached to lineage organizations, the development of ritual specialists in Longtan responded to the rise of lineage organization in the same period. While the growing collection of ritual texts was linked to the expansion of ritual specialists' repertoire, the attachment of ritual specialists to lineage groups marked the localization of ritual specialists to local communities. Both trends indicate the rising role of rituals and ritual specialists in local society.

Invention through Transmission

Although people usually presume that ritual texts should be precisely reproduced to maintain integrity, ritual specialists did not passively receive all the texts and keep them intact. On the contrary, the texts in Chen Daoxian's collection show that ritual specialists actively transformed the texts to meet their current needs. There were several ways for ritual specialists to modify their texts.

First, the ritual specialists actively selected the texts they copied. In addition to the texts inherited from his masters, many ritual specialists copied new texts from

⁵⁰ Ye Mingsheng 葉明生, "Pingnan xian Logntan cun shangyuan qingnai jiaoyi yu daotan keyi yanjiu 屏南縣龍潭村上元請奶醮儀與道壇科儀研究," *The Conference of the Comparative Studies of Local Cults in Academia Sinica*, Taipei, 2008, 17-18.

various sources. In the case of Longtan, Chen Daochang and Chen Daoji greatly expanded their collection by copying texts from neighboring villages during the nineteenth century. Many texts they collected during this period were related to the ceremonies for ancestors, such as the Yulan ceremony in Zhongyuan,⁵¹ and the ceremonies to worship the Lady of Linshui in Shangyuan. Since ancestral worship is crucial for a single-surname village like Longtan, and the Lady of Linshui is their principle deity, the reason that they chose to increase their collection of these communal rituals was apparently related to the rise of local community during this period.

Like many villages in Pingnan, Longtan went through similar social and cultural transformation during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Except for several contracts, the written records of Longtan villages before mid-eighteenth century were rarely seen. In the nineteenth century, temples were renovated and ancestral halls were built, and only in the late nineteenth century did Longtan have their first degree-holder. Once a village started to reorganize itself, it often started with establishing a communal ritual. Once the regular and formal performance of communal ritual was required, it was natural for local ritual specialists to learn these rituals and collect better ritual texts, especially those supported by a specific ritual tradition and recognized by villagers and neighbors. Once the ritual was authorized by substantial written materials, it could be served better in making a communal bond.

Second, in order to make ritual texts easier to use, copyists punctuated sentences, glossed obscure characters, and annotated texts between the lines or on the margins. Sometimes they used other references to help them. For example, although all these

⁵¹ The local term for Yulan ceremony is “the ceremony for fathers and mothers” (*gongpohui* 公婆會), explicitly stating the purpose of ancestral worship.

ritual manuals were hand-copied and most of their sources are unknown, some evidence shows that Chen Daoji might have consulted with printed books in his copies. In one collection of Buddhist incantations, he noted that he glossed the pronunciation “following the Drum Mountain 鼓山 printed edition.”⁵² In this collection of fourteen Buddhist incantations, he used black ink to copy the incantations and red ink to punctuate and gloss the words. “Drum Mountain printed edition” here should be the volumes printed by the Monastery of Gushing Spring 湧泉寺 on the Drum Mountain in the north of Fuzhou city, which was the most famous institution for printing Buddhist scriptures in southeastern China during the late imperial period. There is no direct evidence that Chen Daoji had read the volumes printed by this Monastery, but he might have seen the reproduction of these authoritative imprints and took them as the standard to gloss his copies. These intertextual glossaries led his and his successors’ way to read and understand these texts. Many ritual texts that ritual specialists collected could be dated back hundreds of years and the gap between their languages and current ones keeps increasing. To better perform these texts, some of them need texts from different sources.

Third, ritual specialists sometimes compiled their own selections. For example, prolific Chen Daoji not only copied several formularies, but also compiled his own. There were not many formularies or collected exemplars before him, but several selections appeared during the late nineteenth century with Chen Daoji’s and his successor, Chen Daocan’s 陳道燦 signatures. Most of the selections were categorized by theme or by genre, but sometimes different kinds of texts were transcribed together in the same booklet. For either intellectual or practical purposes, they show these ritual

⁵² *Zhufo jingzhou* 諸佛經咒.

specialists' efforts to systemize these ritual texts by classification. The best example is Chen Daocan's compilation of selected talismans. The talismans included in his selection were roughly classified by their usages. Each talisman was featured by an illustrated example, and some with a brief instruction or the spell used together. These selections were compiled for the compilers' own convenience, but they were also an asset they tried to pass on to their successors.

Fourth, it was not uncommon for ritual specialists to edit the texts they collected, as they had more experiences and more skilled in editing. In many cases, because a longer rite or ceremony usually consisted of several successive sections, and many sections from different ceremonies, such as "Inviting the Deities" or "Establishing the Altar," were very similar (the only different part might be the names of the deities they summoned), a ritual specialist may reorganize the ritual manuals in his possession, and made them a completely new set. Since these manuals might be collected from different sources and be reorganized, the ritual specialist would have to adjust the contents to make each section consistent with one another. Even not for the purpose of reorganization, a ritual specialist might also need to cross out characters or insert new sentences to make the whole text more comprehensible (Figure 28). For example, one section manual that Wu Daoxuan copied in the mid-eighteenth century and Chen Daoji acquired in the late nineteenth century was not only punctuated with red ink but also corrected by Chen Daoji in many places, including changing several characters to make it more colloquial, noting the paragraph where the specialist should submit the memorial, and inserting a verse at the end of the manual.⁵³ In a ritual manual copied by Chen Daoji's another son in the early twentieth century, the postscript explicitly said

⁵³ *Jinshang Songfo* 金山送佛.

that he edited the whole section by adding and deleting several sentences and hoped his successors could continue to correct it.⁵⁴



Figure 28 Corrections on a handcopied ritual manual

It is often assumed that textualized rituals are rigid and have less room for change, but the case in Pingnan proves that even such highly textualized ritual system is changing over time, and ritual specialists played an active role in adjusting the texts and the ritual performance. A Ritual specialist has a certain degree of flexibility to select the texts he needed, adds his own interpretations, and transmits the adjusted texts to the next generation. He also uses his knowledge and experience to clarify the sentences, compile new selections and reorganize the section manuals. These ritual specialists do not only passively duplicate and transmit the texts to next generations, but also participate in the process of textual creation. The active role of ritual specialists in textual manipulation is the key to continue a ritual tradition, but at the same time to trespass the boundaries of traditions and make a practical and local-oriented one.

⁵⁴ This was made more apparent by his successor and his son, Chen Daoling 陳道靈. In a remark of one manual he copied, he explicitly said he edited the whole section he copied and hoped his successors could continue to correct it. *Qin'gaong ke* 請供科.

Conclusion

Comparing textually based rituals to the rituals in oral society, some scholars suggest that the rise of authoritative texts created a different sense of historicity, as well as the traditionalism in ritual performance. While in the oral society ritual performance can be promptly used in response to the a current situation in the community, textualized rituals are required to abide by written texts, and even becomes the performance to enact the written guidelines from authoritative canons. “Rigidity” is highly valued and becomes a criterion to judge the legitimacy of a ritual. One of the consequences of textualized rituals is the conflicts between the universal ideas or practices in authoritative texts and the regional or particular ones. Moreover, the status of ritual specialists has been elevated as they became more specialized and even professionalized. Especially under the widening gap between liturgical languages and people’s daily languages, an expert literary skill is required for ritual specialists. Ritual practice is therefore dominated by a small group of people whose qualification is guarded by the limited transmission of secret knowledge.⁵⁵

However, it is difficult to verify this assertion in history. Stressing the clear-cut difference between oral and literal societies is rather a convenient way to make a conceptual contrast, but for such a complicated society in China, it is almost impossible to rule out all the variations and reach a definite conclusion. The general textualization of rituals in China is a long process, and so is the process by which these textualized rituals were practiced at the local level and different layers of society. Current Daoist

⁵⁵ See the discussion and summary in Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 202-205.

liturgies consist of texts formed in different periods. Some of them can be traced to as early as the first century, and several can surely be found at least from the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵⁶ With the cohesion of Daoist rituals and local cults, Southern Song was the crucial period for the popularization of these rituals and the formation of lay Daoist priests at the local level.⁵⁷ Another key period was the late Ming, when the syncretic religious scriptures, including moral books (*shanshu* 善書) and precious volumes (*baojuan* 寶卷), were widely disseminated under the flourishing print culture, and entered the ritual texts that local specialists performed.⁵⁸ In this incessant process of fabrication and inclusion, the body of ritual texts expanded by merging texts from different periods. As a result, the juxtaposition of texts in different temporalities creates a sense of timelessness and eternity for the rituals.

Although there seems to be a general trend of the popularization of ritual texts and textualized rituals, this trend came to each community under different circumstances and resulted in different consequences. Similar to the case of contract that I discussed earlier, it is also promising to study the adoption of ritual texts in regions of different cultural and social backgrounds. The case of Daoist rituals in southwestern China has particularly attracted the attention of several anthropologists

⁵⁶ Schipper, “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism,” 48; Catherine Bell, “Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy,” *History of Religion* 27 (1988), 366-92.

⁵⁷ Edward Davis, *Society and Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ For example, some verses that were recited during the ritual and recorded in ritual texts I found in Pingnan were almost the same as those in the moral books or precious volumes during the late Ming, such as this verse of wishes in *Bingshi daxia ke*, 43-44. Also see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

and historians.⁵⁹ Many of these communities in southwestern China shared different cultures from that of the Han Chinese, and some did not read and write Chinese before adopting Daoist rituals and their organized ritual texts. These ritual texts they received from the Daoist liturgical system interacted with their aboriginal culture, and became one of the most important sources to shape their religion and other spheres of life.⁶⁰

In the case of Pingnan, where Chinese literacy had existed for a long time, the situation was more complicated. It is difficult to know exactly when textualized rituals came to Pingnan and how they were received. Furthermore, as our observation in contracts and genealogies, this process might not be linear and accumulative. However, this chapter demonstrates that at least in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, written texts already occupied a central role in the ritual performance in Pingnan villages, even though most villagers were illiterate. Many village rituals were influenced by Daoist liturgies, inherited the bureaucratic model in Daoist cosmology, and stressed the procedure of communication by formal documents. The sections of rituals were mainly composed of various textual practices, from submitting written plea, chanting scriptures to burning talismans. Each text for each ritual section had its own format and had to be performed with the right movement at the right moment. To manage these texts requires literary skills and knowledge, and therefore a group of specialized practitioners was formed. They not only taught their successors required knowledge

⁵⁹ See Michel Strickmann, "The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China," Sakai Tadao Sensei Koki Shukuga Kinen no Kai hen 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念の会編 eds., *Rekishī ni okeru minshū to bunka: Sakai Tadao Sensei koki shukuga kinen ronshū* 歴史における民衆と文化: 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai, 1982), 23-30, and the following studies done by Eli Alberts, Takemura Takuji, David Holm and other scholars.

⁶⁰ Eli Alberts, "Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit: Myth, Schema, and History in the 'Charter of Emperor Ping'," *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* 9.1(2011): 19-65, and several articles in Takemura Takuji ed., *Girei, minzoku, kyōkai: Kanan shominzoku "kanka" no shosō* 儀礼・民俗・境界: 華南諸民族「漢化」の諸相 (Tōkyō: Fūkyōsha, 1994), especially the ones written by Takemura Takuji and Yoshino Akira 吉野晃.

and skills, but also reproduced and transmitted ritual texts to next generations. In the nineteenth century, the group of hereditary ritual specialists was further attached to the lineage organization. While, compared to Christian priests, local ritual specialists in Chinese villages were not supported by organized churches and did not have economic basis, their attachment to the most important local organization gave them the social status in local society.

To some extent, the expansion of the practices of ritual texts in these villages belonged to the general expansion of “textual culture” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Written texts penetrated into villagers’ different realms of life, including their ritual performance. Similar to other texts, written texts in rituals were made to maintain certain kind of order, which was supported by the traditions that these texts conveyed. By applying these texts, local practices were attached to a broader cultural framework: the political agenda of the state, the lineage culture, the mode of trades and economic exchanges, and, in the case of ritual texts, different religious traditions.

Among many local practices legitimized by textual connections, ritual performance particularly relied on a long textual tradition and complicated formats of texts. Even in the marginal mountains like Pingnan, far away from political and economic centers, highly formalized texts, as those copied by Wu Daoxuan in the early eighteenth century, were still required in their ritual practices. This made ritual texts a particular textual tradition in local societies. Transmitted among a selected group of ritual specialists, these texts were often stable. A community might not have a huge stele, a refined genealogy or many formal contracts and account books, but the ritual specialist there often kept the most complicated textual materials. Even though the texts

were reproduced recently, their content could often be traced to several hundred years ago.

On the one hand, ritual texts seem to be stable, compared to other genres of texts; on the other hand, the mutual construction of texts in different realms was also obvious in ritual texts. Apparently many texts applied in rituals came from secular realms. Bureaucratic documents were widely used in rituals, so were contracts and tallies. Many textual practices, such as signatures and seals, were used to create the credibility of textual materials, and were also used in ritual texts. Both ritualistic and secular realms had many public displays of text, which were symbolized to different degrees. Although many formats of ritual texts were adopted from the secular ones, they often had a regular presence in local communities before the reach of secular documents. Not many small villages had the chance to submit a petition to the emperor or even make a tally with official bureau, but they would have the better chance to see these documents in a Daoist ritual or other cults influenced by Daoist liturgies. In other words, since ritual texts were usually the most complicated textual practices in a village, they influenced how local people perceived texts and textual authority, sometimes even before the village was constantly exposed to other institutional documents.

Not only the texts in secular worlds shaped the format of ritual texts, but also ritual texts had the impact on secular texts and textual culture. Sometimes, the texts in ritual also provided sources for texts in other realms. For example, in Longtan, where ritual practices had a strong and early presence but the influence from the state and the lineage was relatively weak, when they eventually started to compile their own genealogy, many of their sources came from their local ritual specialists, who kept the name list of their ancestors, including their names, the names of their wives and sons,

and sometimes the date of death and the locations of tombs. This list was compiled for the ceremony of ancestral worship. Although many early details were not reliable, it became the only information for villages to know their family history and to compile a formal written genealogy. Many other genealogies were constructed on the basis of the records in registers of graves (墓簿 *mubu*), registers of ritual, or other ritual documents, such as “the petition for the parents’ salvation” (報恩情詞 *bao'en qingci*) in the Yulan ceremony. These texts were initially produced for rituals, but became the important resources for other textual fabrication.

In this process of transmission and reproduction, the decisive role of ritual specialists in a ritual was similar to that of attorney, who dealt with documents that their client could not handle. They were the agents between villagers and supernatural power by using written texts and other performance to mediate the two sides. At the same time, they were the agents who brought these homogenized ritual texts to local communities.

However, contrary to the assumption that textualized rituals barely change, ritual specialists would actively organize these texts and sometimes modify them to meet current needs. The constant creation among formalized ritual texts and particular local communities was the force to vitalize ancient rituals in the changing society. As we see in other genres, this tension between following a general tradition and fitting in local contexts was the force for constant creations within an overall frame. Through these creations, ritual specialists and other rural literates kept bringing life to these hoary texts.

Conclusion

I visited Jixia for the first time in 2008. Once the villagers knew my interest in the history of this village, they introduced me to Gan Naixun 甘乃洵. Gan Naixun was a retired worker in his sixties and was commissioned by villagers to compile the genealogy of the Gan family, which was supposed to be the ninth revision of the Gan genealogy since the twelfth century. He was leading a group of four people and had set up an office that was housed in a former ancestral hall (Figure 29). In this office, Gan Naixun and his three partners edited the materials collected from the lineage members in Jixia and other Gan villages in Pingnan. Most of the genealogy was based on two earlier ones compiled in 1915 and 1992. In a bid to expand their genealogical connections as far as possible, the team tried to contact Gan families in other provinces and even those in Taiwan and overseas. A self-trained genealogist, Gan Naixun frequently went to the Provincial Library of Fujian to look for related materials: local gazetteers and genealogies of other surnames, from which he not only collected information, but also learned their formats and terminologies. His passion for their family history made him the most knowledgeable person of the local history of Jixia.

Gan Naixun's effort was part of the wave of compiling new genealogies that has surged among the villages in Pingnan since the late 1980s. In my limited survey, at least thirty-four genealogies of twelve surnames were compiled from 1985 to 2010 in this small county with a population of less than 140,000. Several villages have already carried out a second revision in these twenty-five years, and some have even completed an extended genealogy that includes several villages with the same surname. In order to compile a new genealogy, villagers recovered previous genealogies and lineage documents. For those who did not have a previous genealogy, they copied the genealogical contents from villagers with the same surname to

which they appended information of their current members. During this wave of compiling genealogies, many old texts were dug out from the bottom of dusty boxes, and edited into brand new texts. These silent texts were given a new life and spoke out again.



Figure 29 Gan Naixun (the second from the right) and his team, in front of the former ancestral hall

What Pingnan people do today in twenty-first century China is very similar to what their ancestors did hundreds of years ago. The Yao family during the late Ming sent their young members to neighboring counties and even Jiangnan to look for “connections;” Gan Naixun acquires genealogies from Guangdong and Taiwan, and asks the grandnephews in the village to join the forum on the internet to find more materials about their ancestors and relatives. Many tried to “revive” their genealogical tradition during the Qianlong era and lamented that many sources were destroyed during the war and it was very difficult for them to find some reliable documents. Pingnan people now also try to find materials that have survived the Cultural Revolutions so as to reconstruct their lost link to earlier generations.

Of course there are also some differences. For example, influenced by the heavy volumes that the rich families in southern Fujian made, they now prefer to make a huge, colored genealogy with a hard cover, instead of the little booklets they made a decade ago. Now they hire professionals who edit the documents on the computer before sending them to

printing houses. Moreover, in the county seat, which has moved to Guxia, there are several professional genealogists now. They are retired officials and know how to compile a genealogy even when there is a dearth of original materials. One professional genealogist I met is a retired secretary from the county government. He has opened a small bureau in the county seat, helping customers to deal with various documents and to compile their genealogies. His recent big project was leading the compilation of the extended genealogy for all the Chens in Pingnan.

This phenomenon begs the question: why are people so obsessed with compiling genealogies that span such long periods of time? Or in other words, why do people care so much about textual construction, even though they know it might be quite different from reality. For instance, Gan Naixun surely knows their lives are hardly related to that Gan family who live in Los Angeles. When did people in different parts of China start to have this passion toward texts, and give credence to written materials? This is one theme that runs through my thesis: a change of mentality or *habitus* that believed and valued written materials, thereby allowing texts not only to be used as a vehicle of communication, but also as a vehicle to manage, control, organize and mobilize other people.

Textual Culture from the Local Perspective

If we consider the amount of surviving texts from the past, Northeastern Fujian is not the best place to explore the question of textual culture and literate mentality. In the past decades, texts discovered from villages expand our knowledge to the complicity of Chinese rural society during the imperial period. Of course, the distribution of these texts is uneven. It is not surprising at all that in Yangtze River Delta, the economic and cultural core of imperial China, many texts were discovered in either local archives or villagers' houses. Huizhou is

another place that abundant textual materials were found. The quantity and quality of these texts even made Huizhou a subject of historical study and a showcase for the operation of Chinese local society.¹ The excavation of lost texts could be serendipitous. Few would expect to find so many local archives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a small county seat in Sichuan, or numerous contracts of timber trade in the Miao tenants along a river in Guizhou.

While these local texts became the primary materials for us to explore the past secrets of Chinese society, more curiosities around these texts arise. Why were there so many texts in these rural communities, and when did the proliferation of their production begin? What was the mechanism that produced these texts and how did they influence the lives of the local people? While we explore different historical topics from these texts, should the use of these texts, or the familiarization of textual culture, be taken as a general phenomenon that transformed the operation of Chinese local society? These are the questions I brought to Northeastern Fujian when I started my exploration of this area.

Unlike the Yangzi River Delta, where literary sources are rich, the historical records of Northeastern Fujian before the Ming-Qing period are relatively rare and random. This is not a place known for its literary production but for its unruly people, mountain landscapes and mysterious religious practices. In this marginal region, northern Gutian was on the margin of margin. However, although none of the texts produced before the seventeenth century survives in northern Gutian, the textual tradition here can be traced to the fourteenth century and before. From a copy of a fourteenth-century preface in a nineteenth-century genealogy,

¹ For example, based on the Huizhou materials, Joseph McDermott's new book is able to explore the general process in Huizhou society from different spheres. See Joseph P. McDermott, *The Making of a New Rural Order in South China, I. Village, Land, and Lineage in Huizhou, 900-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

the first chapter of this dissertation traces early textual practices in this region during the Song-Yuan period.

In this preface, the emphasis of various documents, such as licenses, registers, and documents of house dividing, suggests that, even though the general prevalence was unknown, written texts were valued as important evidence at least in some special occasions in this community during the Song-Yuan period. Written texts were particularly important when local communities attempted to organize themselves or interacted with the local government. In this case of northern Gutian, the competition for natural resources was the main force that initiated these practices through the Song dynasty. Based on references to these documents, an early-fourteenth-century genealogy was compiled to articulate them into to a coherent family history and strengthened the connection of this alliance.

Although there have been many reflections on the process of “cultural transmission,”² when we deal with the issues of “transmission,” such as the transmission of a literary genre, a social practice or a cultural concept, we often take it for granted that these genres, practices and concepts sold themselves to the masses without paying much attention to the role of the receivers. Sometimes the process is simplified as a top-to-bottom process, led by a smaller group of elite. The case in northern Gutian shows that, instead of being driven by a particular ideology or led by literati, local people received textual culture for very practical reasons. Texts were used to solve immediate problems, such as filing a lawsuit and protecting their properties. Instead of taking the use of texts as a general process of enlightenment, civilization or even modernization, the basic question we need to consider should come from the perspective of local people: why did these villagers bother to use various written texts? In

² In the field of Chinese history, the reflection can be dated to the discussion on “popular culture” in 1980s. See David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

what historical circumstances would local people need to use written texts in their daily life? Why did they consume their time and energy to learn the skills of reading and writing or even producing their own texts?

If we start from this question in our investigation of textual culture, the answers would be different from place to place, and from time to time. In a marginal community like northern Gutian, the fundamental condition that local people had to face during the Song-Yuan period was to survive in spite of their limited natural sources and the harsh competitions they faced. Local surname groups used written texts to build alliance and to introduce official intervention. In other places, such as a flourishing market towns or a newly established county seat, people were driven by different forces, and would also introduce different genres of texts. This variance reminds us of the fact that we often take the stance of victors as we reconstruct historical circumstances. When we deal the issue of textual culture, or more often, literacy, it is often assumed that “being literate” or “using written texts” was the only desirable choice and itself an inevitable outcome of development. However, it has to be noticed that, even though it might be the result that we can observe – people learn to read and write from very young age and texts are used everywhere – not all the people in history followed the same path. Studying this process more closely from a local perspective is to learn the different historical circumstances that people faced, the different choices they could make, and in a further step, how these choices influenced their destiny afterward and even in their lives today.

State and Texts

Although people in different positions might have different choices, these choices were embedded in a general framework that modified their ranges and the outcomes. The evidence

of textual practices in northern Gutian during the Song-Yuan period is rare and indirect. We do not know whether the activities of Zheyang Zhangs represented common practice or whether they were exceptions. However, the situation became very different from the Ming dynasty onward. Not only do many historical narrations trace the origin to the Ming, but also many genres of texts in this region claim their roots to the Ming dynasty. We found the records of textual practices in different corners of northern Gutian during the Ming. The contents of these texts were more specific, and their formats more formalized. Among the many forces to expand the influence of textual culture, the decisive one was the official documentation system imposed by the Ming government.

Scholars investigate the influence of political administration upon general textual culture in different time periods and locations: the land investigation and the subsequent rules in England after the Norman Conquest, the autonomous village administration in Tokugawa Japan, and the British rule in colonial southern India.³ The political systems are fundamentally different – from a late medieval kingdom to a colonial empire – but the common theme here is the use of written documents by a political authority to govern its subjects, and the similar mode of management by texts being adopted by its subjects outside the political spheres. In these studies, this kind of “literate mentality” was initially endorsed by the state, but became the general condition shared by the people.

The Chinese bureaucratic system has a long history; written documents were systematically used by different layers of administration. What made the Ming system different from the previous dynasties was its ambition to fully expand the official documentation to the lowest level of society by integrating the household registration to

³ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan*; Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

self-monitoring *lijia* system. The creation of household registration records and their update was highly regulated within the hierarchical administrative system. At the lowest level, local leaders were granted the responsibility to manage local documents and became the agents of local governance. Following the expansion of *lijia* system, this policy spread the use of written documents to different corners of the empire.

The Ming system might not have caused fundamental changes to the local society in the core regions where people had long experienced dealings with the government and the employment of other written materials. However, to the relatively marginal communities, to be recorded textually and to have to manage written records could be a very different experience. We see that many narrations of family history in northern Gutian start from the household registration during the Hongwu reign, or at least take it an important stage to place their family into a greater historical framework. The imposition of the official documentation not only influenced the local people at the moment when they were documented, but it also affected how they identified themselves and reconstructed their historical senses in the later periods.

Moreover, the primary significance of the official documentation was not the degree to which the state could supervise its subjects through it – apparently, pre-modern techniques could not support an all-inclusive system of documentation and surveillance – but how local people responded to the system. To deal with this mode of “governing by documents,” local people learned the skills and knowledge to manipulate texts. Since every subject’s duties and obligations were decided by its legal status and what was written in official records, the ability to manipulate the records became an asset for people in their efforts to acquire advantages from the state and to avoid official abuses. These advantages further enabled the people with such ability to have better development, as evidenced by families who got rid of

the duties from their registered military households, or community leaders who distributed their obligations of civil service to lesser families. That is why we can have so many stories about how their ancestors got rid of official duties recorded in the lineage documents, because it was these families, such as Fenglin Yangs and Ruiyun Yaos, who enjoyed better development in their social or economic lives and produced most written records.

For the official documentation system and local administration, the most important effect was not the direct control by the state institutions, but the development of the sense of governmentality among those being governed. This sense of governmentality was enforced by the adoption of the framework set by official documents and demonstrated in the languages, the contents and the forms of the texts that local people produced. In many non-official texts produced by local people in northern Gutian, including the *Genealogy of the Ruiyun Yaos*, several official concepts were repeatedly reproduced. The time was recorded by the reign of the emperor; the space was noted according to the precise units of local administration. The relationships between the rulers and those being ruled, the orthodox moral teachings, and the repeated emphasis of hereditary legitimacy approved by political authority appeared in different genres of local texts, even in the ritual texts supposedly made to be submitted to supernatural deities.

This relationship between textual culture and governmentality brings us to think about the nature of “being governed.” In James Scott’s *zomia*, those people who escaped from the state master “the art of not being governed,” including the escape from written tradition and maintaining orality.⁴ The history of these stateless people can barely be included in our historical studies which mostly rely on texts. However, our people who left abundant written records also had to learn various “arts of being governed.” Among them, mastering the skills

⁴ James Scott, “Orality, Writing, and Texts,” *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 220-237.

of manipulating texts and producing their own written records, like the tutor Yang Zhiyuan did to the Ruiyun Yaos, were the arts that a successful family had to acquire to protect itself from the administration of the state. Rather than a sign of submission, those statements of governmentality in the texts the locals produced, were the ways to create the agency within the structure of pre-modern state. The rise of the Ruiyun Yaos and their efforts to compile such a sophisticated genealogy provide a good example

The Rise of Textual Culture

The Part I in this dissertation covers the period when Pingnan was not yet an independent county. In these three chapters I choose several cases to illustrate how individual families – the Zheyang Zhangs, the Boyuan Sus, the Fenglin Yangs and the Ruiyun Yaos – used texts in a marginal region, and put textual cultures into the context of the relationship between individuals and institutional powers. The relatively long discussion of limited individual cases is partly due to the complexity of these institutional questions themselves, and partly due to the fact that not many materials before the eighteenth century have survived.

The situation is quite different in the Part II. In the Part II, local order was reconstructed after the Rebellion of Three Feudatories in 1680s, and in 1730s, Pingnan became one of the new counties that Yongzheng emperor established in northeastern Fujian. Textual materials are available since the late seventeenth century and much more in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have to reconstruct the history of textual practices before the eighteenth century mostly from retrospective descriptions or later copies of previous documents, but for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I have many original materials produced during that period. Moreover, these texts are not limited to official and lineage

records, but include different genres in many spheres. The quantity and the diversity of surviving texts might not only be the results of better preservation, but also an outcome of a historical development: many more texts have been produced since the eighteenth century.

The proliferation of written texts since the eighteenth century implies a close relationship between the rise of textual culture and the general process of integration in different spheres in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-centuries Pingnan. The overall transformation of Pingnan in these two centuries is obvious. A new county government was established in Shuangxi. This village was selected because it was remote from the county seat of Gutian and situated in the center of unrest. A new county means a series of administrative infrastructures, including official bureaus, clerks, and even litigation masters were reported to move from Gutian to this new county seat.⁵ Another important development was the new quota of government students via civil examinations, which means a convenient connection to the state power for local families. These new literates helped the transformation of local powerful families from military leaders and rebels to civilized gentlemen. At the same time, a network of social elites based on Pingnan was gradually established. While the successful members of Ruiyun Yaos and Fenglin Yangs moved to the county seat of Gutian to become elites during the late Ming, these new Pingnan gentlemen wrote prefaces to each other's newly compiled genealogies.

The transformation was certainly not limited to social and political spheres. The market economy in Pingnan started to revive after the pacification of the Rebellion of Three Feudatories and greatly grew since the late seventeenth century. A flourishing land market and the flow of money support this observation. After the opening of Fuzhou in the mid-nineteenth and Sanduao in the late nineteenth century, the Pingnan economy was further

⁵ *Qianlong Pingnan xianzhi*, 0/3b.

integrated into regional and even global markets. In addition to the material world, changes also happened in the spiritual world. Temples, as well as ancestral shrines, were established and repeatedly renovated, especially in the nineteenth century. More organized lineages and more extended religious circles required more and larger ceremonies and rituals.

These transformations necessitated the proliferation of texts and textual practices. From Chapter 4 to Chapter 7, I trace the increasing use of texts in different spheres of village life and their historical backgrounds: the penetration of genealogy compilation and the competitions among lineage-based gentries, the appearance of stelae and the display of political authority, increasing use of various written materials in rising economic activities, and the creation within the transmission of ritual texts for the current requirement of ritual performance. In order to better trace the changes and illustrate the historical conditions, the chapters are divided into four individual segments; however, these changes happened in the same stage and during the same period. They were all connected to one another, and under a general trend of the rise of textual culture in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-centuries Pingnan.

The interconnectedness among these transformations is obvious. The rise of new gentry was endorsed by the political authority. Most of them came from wealthy families, who accumulated and expanded their wealth by properly managing numerous family properties and investing in the business of long-distant trade. Communal rituals were held to strengthen the ties among lineage members and local communities, particularly when they became larger and more complicated. What lay behind these transformations was a society that became more integrated into a greater world, the different spheres of social life that became more related to one another, and the expanded communities that became more organized and required more non-personal communications. All these trends were supported by the use of different genres of texts as a vehicle of communication and the space to storage information.

The prominent role of textual culture in these transformations in political, social, economic and ritual realms was demonstrated by the proliferation of texts in Pingnan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was not the result of social transformations, but an indispensable part of the transformations themselves.

The rise of textual culture was based on repetitive textual practices in various spheres of daily life. The validity of these textual practices was respectively endorsed by different institutional powers. Political authority was one of these powers that endorsed the use of texts, but in these transformations we can observe various powers from market economy, Confucian ideologies, or religion, that enforced different textual practices: making a contract for land trades, compiling a formal genealogy in Su-style or Ou-style, and burning a petition to deities during a ritual. Furthermore, the significance of the rise of textual culture was not only the changes of habit, but also more profoundly the changes of how a community was constructed, a consensus was achieved, and an identity was formed. By using the texts authorized by these powers to construct a community, achieve a consensus and form an identity, these powers penetrated into people's daily lives in a subtle way.

However, written texts also created a space for people to negotiate with these powers. Local people manipulated various textual materials for practical reasons. In Part I, we see many cases that people manipulated official documents to negotiate their obligations with the states. Written texts also made the diversification of property right, which was formed within numerous negotiations in market economy, possible. Even ritual performances could be changed by adjusting ritual texts. These manipulations thus made written texts a field that people developed their agency within the influences of powers, and therefore literacy became a valuable asset.

The Further Questions about Literacy and Literacies

One phenomenon supporting the fact that these changes in different spheres and the use of different genres of texts were closely related to one another is the names that frequently appeared in different chapters. Zhang Buqi's name was inscribed on several stelae for the new building he donated in the county seat. His name was also recorded in the local gazetteers, greatly honored in the genealogy compiled by his descendants. The corporate property under his name was managed by several account books and agreements, carefully compiled and preserved. The name of Chen Jitang, the only government student qualified to participate the provincial examination in Longtan village, is written on the beam of a bridge (Figure 18) and several temples. While Chen Jitang is a school name, another of his names, Chen Yuanxi 陳元溪, appears in several contracts he wrote for villagers. His name was signed under the title, *bingbi* (the scribe), next to the witness and the contracting parties. His brother, Chen Yuanzhu 陳元株, was a zealous collector and copyist of ritual texts. A ritual practitioner himself, he used the religious name, Chen Daoji, on his copies, and became a main character in Chapter 7. These brothers collected a huge collection of printed and hand-copied books and signed their formal, school and religious names interchangeably on the book covers, a rich resource I have no space to discuss in this dissertation.

While the frequent appearance of Zhang Buqi shows him as an important figure in local history, the multi-faces of Chen brothers as the producers of texts remind us of two important points for further reconsideration in our exploration of the meaning of textual culture: the rarity of literacy and the diversity of literacies. First, their frequent appearance in different texts implies that, at least during the nineteenth century in Longtan village, making texts was still a rare ability limited to a relatively small group of people, so that their names appeared so often in almost all the important texts in nineteenth-century Longtan. Although, as

mentioned earlier, textual culture played an important role in general transformation in this region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most people could not read and fewer people could write or, needless to say, produce their own texts. Even in the mid-twentieth century, 79% of population in Pingnan was still classified as “illiterate.”⁶

This rarity of literacy has to be considered in two aspects. From the aspect of “receivers,” as I argued earlier, the effect of textual practice was not limited to “being read.” We see that many texts produced in villages were not made to be read, or at least not to be read character by character, such as contracts, and even genealogies. Sometimes the presence of text itself, or the process toward its production, was the most important part of the whole textual practices, such as the inscription on a stone stelae or the ritual of writing in a ceremony. In this sense, even illiterate people were interacting with texts and living in texts. They either were passively restricted or influenced by the effect of texts (contracts or ritual texts), or actively realized the meaning of texts without reading it (feel the authority behind a giant inscribed stele). However, more complicated questions arise: when and how did they start to be related with texts, and how do we know the degree that illiterates were influenced in history? For example, how do we know the feeling of an illiterate farmer passing by a stone stele erected by the descendant of Zhang Buqi during the late nineteenth century? These questions are difficult to answer in this stage, and probably could only be examined case by case.

From the aspect of “producers,” we had to realize that the texts we read now were produced by a very limited group of people who were equipped with the rare ability of “making texts.” On the one hand, these “rural literates” in villages need to be carefully

⁶ In a 1947 survey of educational degree, 79% of Pingnan people were classified in the category of “illiterate” (*bu shizi* 不識字). If counting by gender, 70% of men and 93% of women were illiterate. See *Pingnan xian tongji shouce*, 7.

examined, especially the sources of their textual knowledge and their role as intermediators among different spheres of cultures and knowledge. The books collected by Chen brothers could probably provide part of the answer, but more sources need to be consulted. On the other hand, we also have to realize the discrepancy between the written world, and the world outside the realm of texts. In Chapter 2, we see the discrepancy between official records and what really happened created the space for local people to maneuver. The discrepancy between the textual world created by a limited number of rural literates and so many possibilities that did not or could not be recorded could misguide our understanding of rural society and the effect of texts.

Second, the appearance of Chen brother's names also reminds us of the different "literacies" required to make different texts. The Chen brothers produced many genres of texts and their presence in different genres of texts was also different: they even used different names. They were Daoist masters in one text, Confucian scholars in another, and capable scribes to serve their relatives in the third. Although these texts were produced by the same brothers, the relationships between texts and their producers were different, and different texts required different set of knowledge, some of them practical, and some of them occult.

Our perception of literacy is easily led to Confucian education. This is how Evelyn Rawski estimated the rate of literacy in Qing China: the numbers of schools and tutors.⁷ However, different "literacies" – the ability to read and write – are required to produce different genres of texts. Being able to reproduce a ritual text requires very different ability from being able to make an account book or to write an essay inscribed on a stele. To be able to produce one genre of text, one might have to be trained under a specific tradition for a

⁷ Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*.

period of time, or just have to buy a certain kind of reference. In other words, there were multiple “literacies” in rural society. There were many different traditions – clerks, Confucian scholars, ritual practitioners – to acquire different literacies, and different printed or written resources to support them. Although one person could master multiple literacies at the same time, traditions other than Confucian education were often overlooked. For example, Daoist masters or other ritual practitioners as the most literate people who preserve and produce the most texts in many villages could be neglected (Figure 30).

Although this dissertation argues a general rise of textual culture in this location, not all the textual traditions developed in the same path. While the textual practices in social and political realms are relatively easy to be contextualized in historical narratives, the ritual and religious traditions of texts are relatively obscure and would probably be the key to better understand the spread of textual culture. For example, before the appearance of government students who led the wave to compile formal genealogies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have seen the very complicated collection of ceremonial texts copied by ritual practitioners. The way they acquired their literacy was still not disclosed. In Longtan, before the first formal genealogy appeared in the 1980s, their genealogical records were kept by ritual practitioners for ritual purposes. Apparently the development of their lineage organization and its relationship with textual practices were quite different from some others in Pingnan. The multiple literacies remind us the importance to further explore different textual traditions, as well as the diversity created by the interaction among them.



Figure 30 A ritual practitioner in Jixia showed me part of his book collection

Gan Naixun's Genealogy

The two-volume, 680-page *Genealogy of the Jixia Gans (the Ninth Revision)* was published in 2010. This genealogy includes all the related materials that Gan Naixun exhaustively found about their family history, including the picture of a copper plaque of “Famous Village of Chinese Culture and History,” granted by the National Bureau of Cultural Heritage and a telegram from the PRC president, Xi Jinping 习近平, who was then the governor of Fujian province. This is the largest textual composition that this village had ever produced.

He places his own preface after a series of prefaces written (or supposedly written) by his ancestors, ranging from one dated 1146 which has appeared in the genealogies of the Gans since the fifth revision in 1814, to the preface from 1992 which was written by an old man who is still alive and lives in the village. During the compilation of this genealogy, Gan Naixun was invited to visit Taiwan by someone who was supposed to be his relative. This “relative” did not participate in the compilation but is listed as the co-author of this new

genealogy. Gan Naixun concludes his preface with these words: “the relatives in the mainland and across the strait can find the shadows of their ancestors from this [genealogy], feel the unbroken connection of blood from this, and evoke their emotion to trace the ancestral origin from thisI wish the ancestral grace for our Bohai Gans 渤海甘氏 can last forever, the relatives on both sides of the strait can, hand in hand, revive the glorious history of our Gans together.”⁸

The compilation of this new genealogy is an attempt to articulate three different temporalities. First, by using the materials from past genealogies, the new genealogy inherits the past narratives, even though some of these materials were fabricated when they were made. A large part of their current identity is legitimated by the presence of these historical texts. Second, the compilers interweave their current concerns into the genealogy. Apparently, the Taiwan relationship across the strait is one of them. Third, this genealogy also projects a common future – the cooperation among the members of the Gans in the world to revive their glorious history, and this common future is based on the past narratives and current concerns. The recurring theme of “callings from history” in these types of texts (“evoke their emotion to trace the ancestral origin”) is not for the past, but for the construction of a common future. To sum up, this new textual fabrication provides a temporal structure of a community, which is supposed to be shared by its members and shape their identity.

However, this important task is done by a retired worker. Gan Naixun did not finish his elementary education. His father was the minister of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs in Pingnan County, but lost his position during the Cultural Revolution. Gan Naixun was forced to stop his education and became a worker in a timber factory in another Fujian county, where he lost his thumb (I found out about this when he spread an old contract for me to take

⁸ *Bohai-jun Gan-shi zupu* (2010), 77-78.

a picture). He left his hometown when he was a teenager and for most of his life, he worked in different places and seldom lived in Jixia. Now he lives with his son in Fuzhou and occasionally comes back to the old house left by his ancestor. He is neither a typical gentry nor a literatus. No one taught him the knowledge of genealogy, but he completed a huge volume. No one taught him to love his ancestors when he was a teenager; but his love overcame the barrier of textual knowledge in his sixties.

When we think about the production of texts and the manipulation, we often treat them as a series of strategic choices after rational calculations. It is therefore difficult to explain the “obsession” of making texts. Gan Naixun’s passion toward the compilation of genealogy probably can be explained as the result of the long traditions of lineage building and textual culture, historical phenomena which developed hand-in-hand since the late imperial Pingnan. It could also be the result that written text became an effective medium of social construction, a medium endorsed by both political authority and cultural orthodoxy. However, these unexplainable passions at the individual level could also be the decisive factor in the production of some specific texts, such as this huge volume of genealogy. When a twenty-second-century historian reads Gan Naixun’s preface, he or she might put his words into the context of genealogy revival since 1980s and consider his action a part of cultural reconstruction aimed at promoting the status of his native village. However, no one will know whether he truly believed in his composition, and whether his passion was real.

The way we read Gan Naixun and his genealogy can also be applied to other local texts from the past. What we read is a collage of textual materials from different periods edited by an author with his own concern. These various materials came from different textual traditions but the author’s concern was embedded in a specific historical and geographical circumstance. The production of these texts was driven by both structural elements and

personal decisions. We can identify many collective features by reading different texts within a certain range of time and space, but each text was eventually shaped by its own context of production: a loyal family tutor with rich literary knowledge, an ambitious government student inspired by what he saw in the provincial capital, or a retired worker with the passion to his family history. Gan Naixun's genealogy creates its own version of historical narratives, so did many texts in the past. The "textual facts" created by many texts in the past were not necessarily accepted by all its contemporaries, but, as the genealogical materials adopted by Gan Naixun, became the basis of later textual fabrications; so would Gan Naixun's genealogy in the future.

It is these tensions between unity and locality, collectives and individuals, that make local texts significant materials to reveal the complexity of Chinese society. And it is the incessant conversations between the texts in the past and the texts in the present that make these texts alive, and reveal the secrets of history.

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